The River Dragon's Bride

龍船節

Lena Leonard Fisher

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

LANTERN STORIES

Photographed by the author

WHERE FLOWS THE MING

THE RIVER DRAGON'S BRIDE

By

LENA LEONARD FISHER

BEING SOME STORY BEADS GATHERED IN SOUTH CHINA AND STRUNG ON A THREAD OF MEMORY

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TO THE DEAR TWO,
MY DAUGHTER AND HER FATHER
WHO WITH ME WALKED
CHINESE WAYS

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I

WHERE FLOWS THE MING

IT is a perfectly Oriental proposition that when I essay to string upon a golden thread of memory some stories, lived out before my eyes, or told to my eager ears in strange, out-of-the-world places by others who had seen their slow unfolding; it is entirely Oriental, I repeat, that the first bead to slip down the shining cord should reflect in its ancient carving the face of a man. If such be the inevitable, I make my politeness to the spirit of the Orient which drives my pen, and meekly submit. The "Orient," being interpreted, is "Man's Land." History, law, tradition, and custom all combine to emphasize the designation. Why not, then, in my pretty string of beads, first, the story of Handy Andy?

I never heard his Chinese name, though

doubtless that most honorable cognomen was borne by a hundred generations, or mayhap a thousand before him. It was as "Handy Andy" that the American Woman Doctor introduced him to me in her crude little Hospital of the Good Shepherd back in the old city of Ancestral Abodes. This most ancient and delectable city lies in the very heart of those purple mountains which enwrap the path of the Ming River, remote from here, it seems to me to-day, a million miles. The trail I followed, at whose finish I found the city, the hospital, and finally Handy Andy, is a thousand years old—it may be ten times that for all I know. Was not the dreamy old river on whose tide our house boat floated spanned by the "Bridge of Ten Thousand Ages," whose hoary grayness gave it every evidence of being true to name?

The incoming tide from the sea urged us on under its crumbling arches after a hasty embarkation from the moss-slippery jetty of a city in southern China which was old when the Bridge of Ten Thousand Ages was

THE BRIDGE OF TEN THOUSAND AGES

brave and bright with youth. I say a hasty embarkation, for though our bed clothes and food hampers and general travelers' junk had been in readiness for all of two days, the little gray house boat, all swept and garnished for our arrival, must condition her going upon the inward tide from the sea, which, only a matter of three hours below where the old city of Foochow waked and slept, received the turbulent and muddy flood of the most majestic Ming. In time, however, came a runner sent to us by our skipper, who down at the jetty with crew mustered—five men including himself and his surly son—had with true nautical eye detected the exact instant when the current of the big river turned upward. The message was brought by a pig-tailed coolie, and was brief and very much to the point. It was delivered with ceremonious politeness and was to the effect that "The tide is now flowing top-side and the boat can walk. Would the most honorable foreigners be good enough to very much hurry?"

So "very much hurry" we did. Sa-ho,

the cook—may the benediction of his honorable ancestors abide forever upon his head!—and Cing-soi the houseman—a gentleman, or there never was one—gravely directed the baggage coolies, and with polite dignity steadied us, as we scrambled down the slimy water stairs. A moment later, having clutched with fervor the end of the bamboo pole obligingly held out to us from his perch forward by the skipper of our craft himself, we had safely made the distance between shore and boat across the bobbing gangplank, and were off.

There was no poling of the boat to begin with. The upward urge of the sea tide was all the motor power we needed for the first leg of the voyage. Once safely through the massive gray arches of the two hoary bridges which spanned the Ming at the city, the winds came sweeping down from great pine-scented heights, filling our white sails with rushing life. My heart pounded with a wild exultation as we steered straight upstream toward the hidden recesses of those hazy mountains ahead, piled up range upon range

under the glistening, scintillating rays of a close-to-tropical sun at noonday. I had embarked upon that dream journey which since childhood's day of unrestrained imaginings I had always been quite sure I should some time pursue. And now the quest was beckoning just as I had always known it would, up a mighty and all but unknown river, urged on by breezes that had swept across vast fragrant spaces into a realm of happenings which for me experience had never before visualized.

I reflect upon no other vagabond who has treked across earth's unfrequented ways when I record here my great wonderment that no one of them ever returned to impress upon my consciousness the transcendent beauties of southern China. Possibly the task bulked too large to be even attempted. I am quite sure this must be the reason, for I find my own pen growing unaccountably shy at the first mental suggestion of trying to splash upon paper with words any concept of the glories which garment the path taken by the old Ming into the dusky purple silences

of those mysterious mountain solitudes in far Cathay. Range upon range there were of shadowy heights, with sky lines which resolved themselves against the gold of the dying sun into the lineaments of sleeping faces.

Naturally, in China the mountain faces would slumber! For with all the noisy contendings through recent years, of us Occidentals, that China is finally and victoriously awake, facts would seem to clearly disprove our blatant assertions. Else why have her ancestral lands been stolen from her, her ancient national pride humiliated by the foreign aggressor within her gates, her liberty curtailed, and her weakness ridiculed? China still sleeps!

Occasionally in her dreams she has turned over. Within recent moons her right arm, strong, though benumbed by the pressure of her body upon it as she has lain in her age-long slumber—her right arm, I say, moved by some major nerve within her heart of hearts, reached out one day and gripped the student life of her domain. And the stu-

dents of all China, thrilled by that touch, reacted in the Students' Strike with the most potent, far-reaching and effectual demonstration against the wicked and unscrupulous designs of a certain envious foreign power that ever emanated from the Middle Kingdom. Would that some lover of human justice—especially just now, some lover of human justice in China—might impress upon the Chinese student body everywhere that biceps muscles toughen only with the using!

I distinctly saw the sleeping countenance of George Washington in the sun glow along the mountain tops that first night on the Ming. Fancy, though, the Father of His Country asleep in China to-day! It is the spirit of Washington, sleepless, strong, virile, unconquerable, which is just now being reincarnated in the very fabric of the growing body of Chinese students. When, on some great day, this spirit shall be clothed upon with the garments of a towering personality who will blaze the trail to real, not fictitious, national independence to be forever estab-

lished in righteousness and justice, China will forget her inaction—her æons of dreamings—and all China's blue-coated millions will be awake.

Our boatmen are poling us now, for the breeze is tired. That husky but surly one, the skipper's son, is staying well forward in the boat's prow. With his arms akimbo he is solemnly whistling up the wind. This is no quotation. No such marks should inclose that last phrase. It is not a repetition of an old proverb, neither is it a joke. It is a fact. The skipper's son is seriously endeavoring, by making a certain noise with his mouth, to raise the wind.

The task is obviously less arduous than that of poling which is absorbing the rest of the crew to the point of straining muscles and sweating bodies. From our prow these yellow, half-naked giants are casting into the channel their long iron-tipped poles, and with such a leverage they are running along the very rim of the boatside toward the stern of our little craft, which shoots forward by the measure of her own length upon her un-

willing course against the current. Still the surly one stands at his ease and whistles.

It occurs to me as I watch them there in the gathering dusk that nautical ethics on Life's River seem quite like this! It's easy enough to whistle to raise the wind—to make a noise with one's mouth as it were—but usually it's the folk who pole who get anywhere.

The moon's disk is edging over the mountain. As the silver segment widens to emerge presently in full-orbed glory, the craggy summits, reaching up and up through the blue to catch the shining radiance, are mirrored in tender trembling lines upon the river's breast—the river, which like all other living vibrant creation, seems to sleep.

The boat lies at anchor. The crew, including him of the noisy mouth, have bestowed themselves away in an invisible somewhere astern, to dream maybe of some delectable river where everybody whistles and no one poles.

Overhead on a mountain steep of rock huddles pathetically in moonlight whiteness

the crumbling walls of a little temple, its up-curving roof of tile splashed by the brush of passing centuries with tones of mellow brownness. A silence unfathomable, unthinkable, is upon the face of the world. The mountainsides, long stripped of the trees which should now be clothing their nudity, could offer no shelter for even so much as a few feathered things who might disturb the stillness by murmuring in their dreams. I lay prone upon the white deck of the boat saturated in moonshine, drugged by that atmosphere of ultimate repose into almost complete cessation of action, either physical or mental. I seemed an unreal atom in some unreal sphere. Had I been a Brahman, my drowsy soul would probably have whispered "Nirvana."

I am glad it was no violent discordant crash of sound that shattered the spell! Such veritable perfection of quiet must, of course, needs come to an end as do all perfect things. This silence did not end—it simply oozed away upon the sound of the song of boatmen, heard faintly at first, as it was borne to us

from far up the river where the moonlight ceased to be moonlight and became silver mist. It was the old, old song, intoned by China's people of the rivers for a thousand ages, as they cut with cumbersome propellers the spray of the much-traveled waterways which lead to the sea.

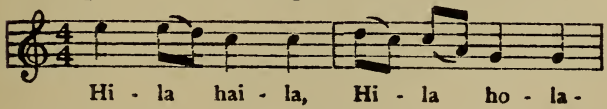
More than once I have luxuriously lounged in a gondola under a silver moon, with the low strumming of a guitar in my ears, while snatches of song from passing boated minstrels lent enchantment to a summer night in Venice. They were beautiful, those nights, and I love their memory. But since my nights on the Ming—those perfect nights—the others pale as do berouged ladies toward morning after a night of dancing and gayety.

This song of the boatmen on the Ming was no ephemeral roundelay, no bit from some flimsy music-hall favorite, popular for a passing moment. This was a song woven out of the fiber of which Chinese hearts have been made since the beginning of things Chinese, which is very, very long ago. No

words of love or romance carried its message. Yet the meaningless syllables, "Hi-la, hai-lā, Hi-la ho-la," chanted over and over again in that uncanny melody spoke of matters mysterious and profound. I sensed through strains of that song the story of the hard labor of men and women as they planted the rice, and convoyed it to cities down the river where it would sustain the physical life of teeming millions. There crooned in its cadences the love of men for women. There trailed through it the laughter of children. There haunted it the ghost-chords of departed ancestors, whose imposing graves looked down from the mountain-sides, and whose spirits are more powerful in death than in life. There breathed through it a deep note of cruelty, of age-old custom; of protest against the encroachment of Western modernism; of smoke of sacrificial incense, of shadows cast by sacred mountains; of the swish of the muddy water of the paddy-field. All these things I heard that night in the song of the boatmen, now coming nearer and nearer through the moon-

light to our anchored craft. It was a man's song, and they sang it antiphonally, the two shifts of oarsmen, in high-pitched, minor voices, their paddles falling to the strange rhythm in absolute unison. They came so near that as I crouched on our deck I could see the water slip from their flashing oars like showers of silver beads.

They came—they passed—and were gone, as millions like them, for ever and a day, had come down the old river, had passed and were gone. One lone cadence of that weirdly magic music to this day sings itself over and over within my consciousness, though my voice utters it not often. Here are the notes as they came to me across the water, but do not try to sing them. The strain is but the wraith of the song, and besides, no one could sing it but the boatmen on the old, old Ming, rowing in the moonlight down to the sea.



Spring had come trailing across the mountains of southern China, just before we, dis-

embarking from our house boat at that place in the river where riotous rapids halt the upstream pilgrim, began the last lap of the trail at whose end beamed the benign countenance of Handy Andy.

Yes, spring had come to dwell for a season in the Mountains of the Moon. I saw her that last day on the trail as we followed it on foot or in chairs, over the well-walked narrow mountain paths toward the city of Ancestral Abodes. She had drawn about her fair young shoulders a marvelous robe of jade green gauze starred with ruby azaleas. She wore milk white plum blossoms upon her breast, and in her hair the feathery fronds of young bamboo. She was decked like an Oriental maiden for the red bridal chair. Oh, she was passing fair!

But the distant mountaintops are projected against the glare of the departing sun in purple boldness as the day wanes—our final day on the trail. We linger for a moment on the crest of the last heights to be topped, with a tender good night in our hearts for the lovely world which we seemed to be leav-

ing behind, drowsy now, with all its spring-time glory upon it.

There at our feet upon the dark side of the mountain we behold the trail's end, that ancient city, rising like a phantom thing from a sea of spring green, and protected by encircling mountain sentinels stern and strong. Once more the chair coolies swing us upon their tired shoulders and the last descent begins—and ends.

We are at the portal in the high wall which surrounds the Hospital of the Good Shepherd. A bell clangs, there are voices within. Then the gate swings wide, and there stands the American Woman Doctor with a welcome in her outstreched hands and in her radiant eyes a great gladness. And just behind her, with dignified gratification in every line of his long blue coat and his close-fitting black satin cap with its red knob, stands he whose story has occasioned this rambling write-up of the trail in China which led us to him.

II

A CHINESE HANDY ANDY

HE Woman Doctor was responsible for his being called by the somewhat unusual name of Handy Andy. I dare say this Chinese man, by his capable all-aroundness, had reminded her, that summer when she built the Hospital of the Good Shepherd down in the fertile Lek-du valley, of his Celtic prototype.

Already you know of the trail which led us to him. Now I am telling you his story as I had it from the Woman Doctor herself as we sat in the fire-glow after supper, in her own inglenook, a bit removed from the center of hospital activities.

He was a dignified but gracious Chinese man, this Handy Andy. No one would ever indulge, when referring to him, in the usual terms affected by flippant foreigners when writing either intimately or casually of the

people of far Cathay. He was a Chinese Man, which in his case included also being a scholar, a diplomat, and very certainly, a Christian gentleman.

The Woman Doctor finding quite impossible for the hot summer's sojourn her first headquarters, consisting of a stuffy room or two in the abode of somebody's honorable ancestors, was forced to look for another base from which to work. Furthermore, after much searching for cleaner—to say nothing of cooler—quarters, eventually the Woman Doctor found domicile for herself and her servant in the house of Handy Andy, which stood a lap or two up the mountainside, and was etched out of a background of bamboo groves. There flourished the buxom partner of his choice, or, to be more exact, the choice made for him in his callow days by some go-between, the matrimonial agent of his honorable parents. Chinese marriages make no claim to being shaped in heaven. Why should parents decide for their progeny the comparatively unimportant and transient matters of childhood, and then basely aban-

don them when the most vital and significant question of marriage matters arises? Plainly the duty of making this choice is paramount to that of all others—so at least reasons the Chinese parental mind.

Mrs. Handy Andy, who was of rather high official lineage, may have with docility permitted herself to be chosen by her honorable parents-in-law to share the domestic fortunes of their son, but she never exhibited any particularly striking characteristics of tractability until long after the development in the life of her somewhat subdued liege which I am here recording. The change in her was solved through those circumstances which ultimately led her to become a Bible Woman. After that great thing happened, with the Holy Classic under her arm through many years did she patiently and joyously travel, without complainings, in torrid heat or sheets of rain, that the untaught women in those "other villages" might hear of the great miracle which had made her own life worth while.

In the early years various joy feasts were

spread in the house on the mountainside in honor of certain tiny almond-eyed little strangers who came to insure the continuance for many generations to come of the lineage of their father. When the Woman Doctor took up her abode in that house the wee strangers had become very much at home—rollicking chunks of boys and girls, their black hair done in cunning patches and pig-tails, their black eyes shining with mischief, their blue coats and trousers going to make an altogether irresistible juvenile combination.

At some time before the coming to his house that summer of the Woman Doctor, its master had learned of the "Doctrine" to his own soul's entire satisfaction and his family's entire mystification. That their father was afflicted with a strange species of insanity was confided in whispers by the children to the Doctor before she had been under the roof for a single moon. Each day, they solemnly averred, he trod the steep path which led through the bamboo grove at the back of the house, not once, but several times.

Infantile curiosity is not exclusively an Occidental commodity. Behold, then, these small Chinese delights of their father's heart secretly trailing that most honorable personage up the path and into the grove of feathery greenness which to his devout soul had become the oratory within whose lace-like walls he held communion with an unseen Presence.

Not only so, but with all due impressiveness was this sensational fact reported to the mother of the house—*ad libitum ad nauseam*. Had they not seen their most exalted father upon his knees there among the bamboos, with uplifted face and closed eyes as he talked aloud with some strange God, of whom, hunt afterward as they would, they could find not the faintest trace?

The entire family, including their foreign guest, when upon various high occasions she was bidden to partake of a meal with them, could testify that before the master of the house would taste one morsel of his steaming bowl of rice he would bow his head, and hold conversation with Some One, whom none

of them, stare about the room with wide-open eyes as they would, could see. Afterward one of the servants reported to his exasperated mistress, who had no sympathy whatever with such erratic behavior, that he had distinctly observed the Woman Doctor herself doing the same mysterious worship over her own rice in her own apartment. At what possible conclusion could the idol-worshiping mother and her children arrive, except that the Doctor was afflicted with the same sort of craziness as the man of that house, inasmuch as they both at various times spoke aloud to Some One whom no one else could see?

During the long, hot summer days rose certainly if slowly the walls of the new hospital. The Woman Doctor found her hands more than full as she supervised the processes of building and guarded the innumerable points which invariably arise with Oriental contractors. All of these points were to be particularly reckoned with if the funds at her command, most of which she herself had laboriously gathered, were to cover the

final cost of this first and only refuge for suffering women and children in all that section of the province. In fact, it was almost too much of a task for even the Woman Doctor.

In spite of her watchful eye all sorts of things in the way of building material had a mysterious and most annoying fashion of disappearing without leaving a trace. The situation clearly demanded omnipresence, and this, with all her equipment of brain and body, the Woman Doctor had never been able to achieve. By day she was very confident, being constantly upon the ground. By night she was helpless, for with all her temerity of soul and nerve she couldn't sleep and at the same time keep watch over a half-finished hospital.

"Where thieves break through and steal" is no mere figure of speech in the Orient. One is vastly amused at first, over there, upon sight of an inclosing wall with fanciful but flimsy ornamental border at the top done in plaster in a sort of embroidery design. But he changes his mind when he learns that

the flimsier the coping the greater the clatter by which some night prowler is announced as the plaster fancywork crashes into pieces against the weight of the ladder by means of which he tries to climb up and over "some other way." Verily I mused as I learned, after all, fancywork may have its uses!

The Woman Doctor had no stone adornment atop her wall, and anyway it is doubtful whether singlehanded she could have managed a bandit party at 2 A. M., though she has a reputation on both sides of the Pacific for her skill with a knife. The fact is that while the walls of the Hospital of the Good Shepherd were rising the services of a dependable man who should act as major domo were absolutely essential. Having been a close observer of her Chinese host during the time of her sojourn beneath his roof, and of his fidelity under the trying conditions involved in being the Christian head of a non-Christian home, the Woman Doctor was inspired to proffer to him the job of overseeing hospital affairs.

Handy Andy looked very gravely at her

when she broached the subject to him, and then with characteristic Oriental deliberation told her he would give her an answer in two weeks. Fortunately, however, his decision was reached within a few days, and was both definite and favorable, the party to the second part assuring the Doctor that regarding her offer divine direction had been given him in a vision.

In this vision, so he affirmed, he had very clearly seen his Master, who had said to him plainly, "Follow the Foreign Doctor." And the Woman Doctor, rather askance at such a bold declaration of divine leading, was moved to expostulate. God never directed one human being to follow another, she argued to him; it must be the Great Guide whom he had been directed to follow, not an American Woman Doctor! Had he not, after all, been mistaken—the ears of his soul been a bit dull of hearing? But Handy Andy remained obdurate. It was the Foreign Doctor whom he was to follow.

Thereafter with a great solemnity upon her, the Woman Doctor was more than ever

careful of her walking, remembering the millstone penalty of him who causes another, even a "little one," to stumble.

So, as is not unusual in Chinese families, the man of the house in the bamboo grove betook himself to his important task, the mother of his children remaining with her flock on the mountainside. If the truth be told, Handy Andy was much more concerned for the salvation of the souls of his wife and children than even for his own success in his new managerial position, which is saying much. In regard to the latter, the Woman Doctor intimated to me that in all the forty thousand or more characters in the Chinese language there were none sufficiently strong to express the measure of his value to the hospital project.

Eventually the little family moved down from the mountainside and became dwellers in the hospital compound. This was after another "vision" in which Handy Andy had plainly seen his wife and his little son drowning in the depths of a deep, dark well, their imploring hands stretched out to him for de-

liverance. The Hospital of the Good Shepherd almost lost him then, because he was convinced that it was his plain duty to go back to the bamboo grove and set about vigorously to bring the mother of his children, with all of them also, not into the compound of the Hospital of the Good Shepherd—that was not his plan—but into His fold. All this he got out of his vision. I myself am no scoffer at visions capable of such sane interpretations.

It is not the story of the coming of his heart's desire for his family that I am here setting down, though that is a stirring narrative. This is to record that Christian consecration may be much enhanced by Christian diplomacy, a fact finely demonstrated in the planting of the much desired Sunday school in the City of Ancestral Abodes by that apostle of the Lord called by the Woman Doctor Handy Andy.

Do not forget that this same apostle of the Lord was by birth of no mean origin. I tell you that I myself have walked through the mazes of his own ancestral home, where in

THE TOMBS OF THEIR ANCESTORS
(A Mandarin Grave)

the old days two hundred people, all being of the families of his own clan, were dwellers —and at the same time, too. Likewise there were six front doors, and what better or more adequately than this architectural feature could bespeak its abounding hospitality? To my heart this also spoke, and it was of another many-mansioned house where doors will not sag on rusty hinges nor deserted halls be haunted by voices long silent.

It was at that particular time of the year when all masculine China, to the extent of fathers and eldest sons, streams forth to the hillsides to do worship at the graves of departed ancestors. Also they place upon these graves offerings which are designed not only to visualize the measure of their filial devotion, but also to felicitate materially the spirits of the departed in their present habitat. Remote be the time when China, saturate with Western irreverence, shall forget this most lovely of all her ancient customs!

It was the time of year, I say, when the fathers and big boys, most imposing in their long silk coats, went out to the graves,

and the little boys stayed at home in utter insignificance—and ordinary blue cotton coats.

Now, it fell out that just at this time in his daily Bible reading Handy Andy came upon the first chapter of Matthew, and that particular portion of Scripture with us not often thumbed because of much reading, seemed to glow before the eyes of this most practical dreamer of dreams with a great illumination. At chapel prayers that morning he observed that he noticed how the Hebrews of the Lord's day made very much of the ancestry of their honorable houses, even as had been the Chinese custom for many ages. He could not but deplore that the younger boys of his own clan knew so little of its ancient history.

Presently he crossed the railless foot-bridge which wormed its uncertain way across the river, and divided the town into two parts as distinct as ever were the three into which Gaul was divided, and entered one of those six front doors in his own ancestral house within which discontented little

Chinese boys who couldn't go graveyarding were dragging out a dismal day.

Sympathy was sweet to that accumulation of infantile misery, so Handy Andy's benign proposition that he assist them in having an ancestral celebration of their own met with instant response—that is, as "instant" as anything in the Orient can be.

In the reception hall of "Heaven's Well," that three-walled apartment with the fourth dimension, quite open and giving upon the stone-flagged court, to the poetic mind of the Chinese the bottom of a "well," whose cover is the blue sky—in this room gathered with their guest that group of younger sons. And the guest, that subtle apostle of the "Doctrine," his eyes flashing, his language aglow, recited to them out of the genealogy of their clan the glorious exploits of their famous ancestors whose tombs in the hillsides were the shrines of family veneration and worship. And if this were not enough, this august uncle of theirs opened before their shining black eyes certain ponderous books, the most valued possession of their clan, in which be-

sides much else of glorious history, all the things he had related to them were written down.

The first adventure into genealogical pastures was a huge success. At the most urgent entreaties of the Younger Sons it was repeated upon two or three occasions. The Y. S.'s were thrilled with importance and their most exalted parents highly gratified that into the fiber of these young sprouts on the family tree such valuable information was being infused.

When clan enthusiasm had reached its peak the instructor quit! In vain was he importuned to resume his recitals by various of the Younger Sons who chanced to meet him here and there as he looked after the business of the Hospital, which long since had become a lighthouse set in the sea of human suffering of that district. Later came a most polite and formal letter, written in Chinese characters upon bright red paper—quite like a wedding invitation—urging the self-appointed professor of the history of his house to return to the eager group in the reception

hall of Heaven's Well in his own ancestral house, but he went not.

It was only after a formal visitation of the head men of his clan, who pointed out the great benefit which would be conferred upon the rising generation of the illustrious clan which was his as well as theirs, that Handy Andy rather reluctantly consented to resume his labors among the Younger Sons.

Very adroitly then did this Christian diplomat suggest to his non-Christian clansmen that personally he would be much advantaged could one certain day be set apart wherein he could materially assist the young grafts on the family tree in their growth toward the ideals of filial devotion and deeds heroic as exemplified in their ancestral annals.

Besides these valuable facts he said he had it in his heart to teach them a few others. You will have guessed what the few "others" were which to this hot-hearted disciple of Jesus Christ mattered most, being those referring to Him in whom "all the families of the earth" should be blest. Also he suggested that about once in seven days he could con-

veniently leave the Hospital and travel across the rickety footbridge to the house of his ancestors for the purpose they urged.

So it fell out that upon that day which the Christians called the Sabbath a Chinese ambassador of Jesus Christ became the center of a permanent group of boys, which, under his inspired guidance, merged presently into the Sabbath school which had for long been the desire of his heart.

Later the Sabbath school became a church.

Was not I myself guided by Handy Andy to his ancestral home of which I have told you? And did not my own eyes behold the reception hall of Heaven's Well, which now on every Sabbath day is filled by a worshiping congregation?

III

THE BLIGHT OF BEELZEBUB

HE led me out of the delicate loveliness of her room where we had "tiffined" together up a broad stair and into the shaded shelter of the sleeping porch. There she gently urged me into a steamer chair with its most inviting lazy-looking length, while she herself sat upon a bamboo stool at my side and told me the story which I am telling you.

"She" in this case was the wife of the Theological Professor in the College for boys. I mean by that, that "He" was a theological professor four days in the week. The other three both "He" and "She" were evangelists known and adored throughout all the tropical countryside through which they itinerated, and where almost like forest leaves those other villages were scattered.

She herself had come out to south China

young and enthusiastic from her New England hills, and had had her various and sundry experiences in missionarying before she had added to them by taking on the Theological Professor. And it was of one of these prenuptial episodes of which she spoke to me on that afternoon in May.

I can sense again the setting of her story now as I tell you. I can see the long ribbons of sunlight slanting through the slits in the cool green of the shutters, and falling into golden patterns on the matting which covered the floor. She sat there, slight but vital, her soft brown eyes glowing like gentle stars to light a face of classical oval, haloed by an aura of divinely soft brown hair. If her red lips trembled as she talked, or smiled as some half-forgotten reminiscence played across her mind, it was only to enhance the sweet curve of her mouth or to reveal a fleck of snow-white teeth. Add to all this the flavor of an adorable New England accent and a filet lace collar and you will comprehend instantly why the Professor digressed from his theology far enough to fall in love, and to be

inspired to invite her to itinerate with him through life.

That was a weird subject of which we spoke that day—nothing less than demon possession. I had heard strange rumors, miraculous tales, having to do with such happenings, during my wanderings up country, and of these I had spoken. I confess that lying there in that lazy chair with long bars of sunshine slanting across me, and looking into the face of the charming wife of the Theological Professor, any subject in which Mephisto figured seemed remote. However, I had asked My Lady questions, and she of the dark-blue gown and filet lace collar was essaying to answer.

"Demon possession," she began—and then the story ran on even as I shall tell you.

She had come to China, as she told me, young and eager, and imbued with a very broad "Congregational" belief. This variety of belief, she went on to elucidate, had no time nor room for the recognition of a powerful personality who is the author of all evil, and is continually playing upon its forces to

the great discomfiture of the human race. In short, to her New England mind the devil was not. What other folk thought him to be was simply a lack of positive good—a hole in the bottom of the boat, as it were. But there came a day upon which her mind was to register a change.

The adventure overtook her when, in the third year of her missionarying in China, she and her little Bible Woman were taking their way through some of those villages which were scattered along the river a day or two from the mission center.

My Lady had been experiencing that exaltation of soul which occasionally obsesses the toiler who beholds with radiant eyes the fruit hanging luscious upon the boughs of his endeavor. And why not? At every mud village to which she sampanned she had been received by enthusiastic women who jostled each other in their eagerness to welcome her. "Bing-ang" (Peace to you!) they had syllabled in ascending scale and repeatedly upon her approach—"Bing-ang! Bing-ang!" And sadly they had murmured, "Please, slowly,

slowly walk," when, the teaching of the Jesus Doctrine ended, My Lady was clambering again into her boat. She had drunk tea and nibbled watermelon seeds with gracious gentle women in houses where idol shelves were now a matter of history, and whose little children no longer wore hung about their necks contrivances in which their souls were safely locked, nor jingling bells about their baby ankles to scare away the ever-active demons. "The Kingdom is coming!" My Lady had no doubt of the fact, and there even lurked in the back of her mind the comfortable conviction that she was helping to bring it.

And then the thing happened which, according to My Lady, completely shifted her mental gears in regard to a devil who was a real person, and led her to recognize that evil was by no means merely a lack of good. In fact, over night she swung clean over into the camp of those who assert that "The Prince of this world" is an honest-to-goodness entity who exercises a malignant, malevolent, active force for evil; who grips real

people, and ruins them, and in some cases tortures them and drives them mad.

For several days in a large village My Lady and her Bible women had taught the women and visited them in their houses. All was going well and it was with peculiar satisfaction of spirit that she dropped in, one evening toward the end of her stay, for a call upon a family whose every member had seemed frankly interested in her disclosures of a better way than idol worship, and genuinely determined to abandon the old way of many gods. Very often she had been a guest in that house, being always eagerly welcomed. Very slowly and plainly and very simply had she taught them the fundamental mysteries of the Doctrine, and on this her last visit to them before her journey down the river, the whole family had declared their intention of becoming people of the Jesus Way.

Because of this the heart of My Lady beat so joyously that she could scarcely maintain with dignity her proper New England decorum. For, remember, this family was

outstanding in the community, and its conversion would mean everything to the Cause. Yet My Lady was cautious; she must be very sure of her course. She questioned them closely as to their definitely announced intent, and over its avowal they prayed and sang. The Chinese believe very devoutly in the power of song. And to all her queries, there was always the bold answer—"Yes, we wish to be Christians."

Then the missionary, in order to superintend the destruction of the last bridge which might lead from the new faith back to the old, applying the supreme test—the thumb screws, as it were—to their newly found purpose, demanded that the consent of each member of the household be given to the burning of the household gods. Without parley or reserve, individually and collectively, permission was given. There was no hesitation, no drawing back. "But the Kitchen God," further argued My Lady, "will you allow me to take even that down, and with my own hands?"

Now the Kitchen God, it would seem, is

the last word—the very ultimate—to the Chinese mind in its influence upon the Over Powers, who are alike dispensers of good and evil rewards for deeds done in the Chinese body. Upon New Year occasions—the twenty-fourth of the New Year month, to be exact—before that piece of red paper representing the kitchen deity, which is pasted upon the wall over the stove, for a half day, and by the entire family, worship is offered. Below it smokes the fragrant incense, and delicacies in porcelain bowls are conveniently placed for his delectation. Treacle and honey among the offerings are sweet suggestions that the mouth of the god be closed to the utterance of bitter reports against the family. Is not the kitchen, after all, the heart of the house, and would not the ears of its presiding deity be open to all of those hidden family intimacies which should remain unknown to the public—and, if possible, to the dreaded Over Powers of the spirit world?

So in order to insure a complimentary report by the Kitchen God, when at the New

Year he sojourns for ten days in the abode of the shades, his mouth is smeared with honey, and he is conducted into the spirit realm upon the smoke of his own burning. In ten days another Kitchen God is pasted upon the wall and the new record begins.

This being the god most to be feared and of all the gods the one to whom the Chinese domestic group most tenaciously holds, it took much boldness upon the part of My Lady to follow up the declared purpose of her prospective converts by suggesting that she herself remove from the wall with her own hands the scrap of paper which represented him.

But each time she repeated her query came the united response ready and hearty: "We *do* believe! Yes, you yourself may take down the Kitchen God!"

So in the end My Lady went into the kitchen, followed by the family, pulled out a stool, climbed upon it, and with fingers which trembled with eagerness began peeling off the red paper which represented the tale-bearing god.

Scarcely, however, had the first edge been loosened when out from that corner of the kitchen where stood the little mother, subdued and meek, My Lady told me she heard a tiny noise—a sort of a squeak of protest which almost paralyzed her fingers, sending a shivering and a trembling through her very bones. It seemed veritably as though she were gripped by some evil power quite outside herself, and she was almost too horrified to speak—was like to have fallen off the stool. But presently recovering her mental poise, and her blood having somewhat thawed in her veins, she turned herself toward that corner of the room from which the uncanny sound had come, and looking at the gentle little mother who stood there said somewhat severely, "Oh, then you do not wish me to take it down—you are unwilling?"

But the woman in the corner, who undoubtedly had uttered the cry, answered bravely, though her voice was low, "Yes, I *am* willing," and her husband and his mother, and even the children, joined in a

most earnest response saying, "Oh, yes, we all very much wish you to take it down."

So down it came, My Lady told me, though not with ease, because of her strange consciousness that somewhere resistance to the process was being registered. And afterward prayer was offered and a hymn sung, and with ecstasy in her heart and her first real trophy of service in China, the Kitchen God, in her hand, she left the hospitable home of her gracious gentle converts. They had a joyful evening, My Lady and her Bible Woman. They prayed for every member of that newly converted family and they thanked God for them, and afterward those two went joyfully to bed.

It should have been a day sooner that the sampan carried them down the river. But vital issues hung balanced in those hours by which they had delayed their going, and no shadow of regret that they had not made schedule lurked in the minds of My Lady and her helper. Souls were what they sought—and had joyously found.

And now before they were carried away

on the river's tide, for no one could tell how long, the good-by visit to the new recruits to the ranks of the doers of the Doctrine must be made. With eyes glowing and her exaltation of soul seeping through to illuminate her fair young face, My Lady entered the house whose doors had always at her touch swung wide with welcome. On into the room she fared, where more than once she had bowed with the family in prayer, joyously expectant of the greeting which would mean more this morning than it ever had before, because it would be the mutual greeting of Christians.

She had barely stepped over the high threshold—I am telling you just as she told me—when it seemed to her as though an icy breath from a mysterious somewhere blew across her face.

Before her in the room where many times she had been an honored guest were the same members of the family who, upon her departure only the night before, had accompanied her to the very gate in their outer wall and begged her to "walk slowly." It

was certainly a blighting frost which lay upon the occupants of that room. The head of the house, at his bench, a scowl upon his face, did not so much as raise his head from his work. The old grandmother and the two adorable round-faced kiddies, who had eagerly, almost lovingly crowded up close to her yesterday, kept their places in the far corner of the room, silent and sullen.

But it was the gentle, mild little mother who centered the tragic picture now unrolling itself before the wondering, frightened eyes of My Lady. It was she who at the first loosening of an edge, in the process of removal of that thing on the wall which represented a much-to-be-feared deity, had involuntarily emitted a low cry of protest. Now she sat upon a stool in the middle of the floor, with such a look of savage hatred upon her face as, My Lady assured me, she could never even have dreamed as being possible to overspread a human countenance.

With what courage the missionary visitor could summon to bolster her she spoke to them, greeting them in the old way, and

wording her wish that with them all was well.

And then, while that terrified New England girl grasped the brown wall for physical support, that little Chinese woman, her pan of vegetables in process of paring in her lap, responded to her question with such a tirade of vituperation as she never could have imagined it possible for a human being to syllable. On and on ran the harangue, the vileness of its obscenity seeming to penetrate every corner and crevice of the room. Occasionally, out of pure physical exhaustion, her very breath would fail, and turning her face more fully upon My Lady she would literally froth at the mouth. Again and again this uncanny orgy of verbal abuse was repeated, each succeeding torrent more violent than the one before.

Out of all the flood of incoherent Chinese ravings that was poured into her ears My Lady patched together the gist. Had the woman's recital been continuous, or even calm, it might have framed itself into a brief but tragic statement.

Great peace had brooded over the house of the New Christians, when, their missionary visitor having departed the evening before, they had betaken themselves to rest. If any member of the family was apprehensive because of the empty idol shelf, or the downfall of the Kitchen God, no mention was made of the fact. But the dreams of the mild little mother, who had fallen asleep along with the rest of the household, came to a sudden and direful end toward midnight, by the sudden entrance through her door of the arch enemy of the race, Satan himself. She saw his horrid figure, his frightful eyes. With awful voice and terrible malignity he accused her of having given her consent for the Foreign Woman to tear down from her wall his own image and superscription. He raised a frightful lash like a thousand scorpions and laid it in cuts of burning fire upon her helpless body. In vain she had prayed the little prayer which, she had gathered from My Lady, would be a magic talisman in time of trouble—"Lord Jesus, save me." Though her startled eyes peered eagerly into

the dark for his appearance, he came not. Every repetition of that prayer brought down upon her at the hands of her demon visitor new and awful torture.

Also he flayed her with words, every one of which seemed to sink into her flesh like a knife. "What do you mean," he hissed, "by renouncing me—*me,* whom you and your fathers before you have served, since time for you was? Have not I—*I*—put rice in your bowl, and clothes on your back? And now you and your household desert me—renounce me—*me*—for the God of the Foreign Woman? Come with me to hell!"

He reached out a clawlike hand to grasp her, his unspeakable eyes burning her through like coals of fire—and then the dawn broke, and she was alone.

"But," she shrieked like a mad woman, as My Lady, who had gone faint and white there against the wall, made as though to urge her well nigh petrified body out the door—"but I'll go with him to hell! I want to go—*I want to,* I tell you!" And as if to clinch her own statement with another

reason, she shot forth a final addendum—"There are more folks there anyway!"

"And so," I murmured, as My Lady ceased—"and so—?"

"And so," she said, "I went away and left them, my joy turned to ashes. There was not enough left of me to even speak when I found myself outside the wall. But this I knew, in spite of my New England theology, that whatever it was that woman saw and heard—explain it as you may—it was an active, powerful Force of Evil, which in her case conquered. You may call it what you will. *I* called it the devil."

IV

A HOUSE OF UNDERSTANDING

THEY were going home, those two, from a sojourn of ten days in the Women's Hospital. "Those two" were daughters of Cathay, youngish and by no means unattractive, even as we Occidentals measure good looks. "Home" to them meant a village three days away, in the furthermost mountain they could see in the range beyond, over whose fair contour, even as their journey began, night was already draping soft shadows of mauve and purple.

Not unfrequently as they followed the narrow paths between the paddy fields—those ascending paths paved with sharp little stones whose edges often were turned belligerently upward—did the returning patients from the Hospital pause an instant to look back upon the gray building from which they had emerged within the hour. Across its

friendly walls the declining sun was slanting a glorious shaft of crimson color like a benediction at evening time.

It is small wonder that now and again the eyes of the two mountain climbers were turned wistfully back, until the hospital silhouette had itself become a part of the denser shadows, which having completely blacked out the noisy city upon whose border stood the House of Healing, had crept with sinister surety upon it also. For a House of Healing it had been indeed to them, two neighbors, coming down from that village which lay three days away in the heart of the purple heights. Upon the slender thread of a passing rumor that the Foreign Doctor in the hospital down in the valley, by some strange power of necromancy, could clothe ailing women with health as with a garment they had essayed their great adventure. And all they had heard—and more—the Doctor had done for them, though not by magic, as eventually they were to know.

What was of far more moment to the Two Pilgrims from the mountains in search of

health, the House of Healing had become to them the House of Understanding, and it was of this more than of the other about which both women were thinking as night dropped a dark curtain between them and the valley below, where there stood a Christian hospital for non-Christian women.

Very readily had their not overly serious disorders yielded to the skillful ministrations of the Foreign Doctor. Ten short days had sufficed to make scientific corrections in physical conditions which without such treatment must easily have tied the patients to the questionable comfort of their hard board beds for the rest of their lives. However that may have been, of far greater significance were the mental operations performed, the spiritual correction established in the case of the mountain patients in that House of Understanding. So it was not the former but the latter phase of their ten days' experience in the Hospital which upon their homeward way filled the minds of the returning travelers, and likewise moved their tongues to speech.

Bo-ai spoke first. Bo-ai's mother had given her that lovely name—whose meaning in American is Precious Love—because she alone of three little daughters whom the inconsiderate gods had permitted to invade the family circle had been permitted by the soothsayers to remain in her arms. She had loved all her tiny baby girls, that Chinese mother, who long since had been gathered to her ancestors, and whose red-lacquered coffin had been received into the cavernous depths of the great horseshoe tomb of her family on the mountainside. She being a woman had certainly loved her girl children, but tradition and custom and the sentence of the soothsayer must not be gainsaid—and there was no denying the expensiveness of girls.

It was Bo-ai who, between hard-taken breaths, because the mountain-path was so steep, remarked convincingly to Chieng-ging, her comrade on the upgrade trail, that "certainly and beyond all peradventure, the Foreign Doctor exceeded all other humans in knowledge as well as skill." This seemed to her passing strange, when one considered

that the Foreign Doctor was a woman. Even the children in the street could repeat the age-old proverb current among them all—"A learned man buildeth the walls of a city, but a learned woman teareth them down." Yet there was a woman down on the plain there who had reared the walls of a House of Healing which was also a House of Understanding, because into it entered women, even Chinese women like themselves, to become thinking beings like herself.

"Also," Chieng-ging replied, when because of the stubborn upness of the trail the two had sat down to rest, leaning against a great bowlder over which wide-eyed briar roses clambered, "Also, the touch of the Foreign Doctor's hand, even when its touch was pain, was past all one's thinking most gentle."

Chieng-ging would have much reason to remember a soft touch. The hand of her mother-in-law, who instead of herself ruled her house and her family, had been heavy upon her since that day in her young maidenhood, when in her red bridal chair she had been brought home to her husband's ances-

tral abode. "Thousand Gold" was her name, done into American, but that was no indication that in her own home her value was so measured. She was quite unworthy of regard or dignity of station, inasmuch as she was but the mother of daughters.

Even when late in the night the two travelers sat apart in a quiet corner of the inn where, because of the darkness and the dangers of the narrow path, shelter until dawn had been secured, their conversation was mostly of their great adventure and all which clung to the memory of it. Besides the Doctor, and mostly they spoke of the never-ceasing wonder of her, they talked of the gentle nurses, Chinese women, young, as they themselves had been only a few years back. Caring for the sick is neither a very high nor even a very honorable calling in some places in the world, and surprise that this task had been raised to one of real merit and even distinction was still very much in their minds.

The very servants, so their talk ran on, who prepared the vegetables and did the humble tasks of the compound were very

much of a quiet, peaceable sort of folk. Never once during the stay of the two friends had either of them witnessed or even heard of a brawl among them. An almost unbelievable thing did this seem to them, being accustomed as they were to the vocal onslaughts, so much a factor in the general program of Chinese community and domestic matters.

In foreign lands where mission enterprises function there are inevitably a number, greater or less, of wee folks. In the wards and on the wide verandahs of the Hospital of the Good Shepherd happy children might always be seen playing among themselves, or with their amahs. The amahs never scolded or shrieked at the wee bodies, and the latter, although almond-eyed and olive-skinned like their own babies, seemed somehow of a different world. Possibly they were better babies because of better beginnings—anyway they were different.

But outside of the Foreign Doctor herself nothing which the two mountain patients had observed in the hospital realm had impressed

"A THOUSAND GOLD" TO A CHINESE MOTHER

them quite as amazingly as the Chinese women within it who could read! Concerning this point there were no limits to their enthusiasm. When one reflects that out of every one hundred of China's rank and file five only can decipher the printed character, it is not strange that Bo-ai and Chieng-ging were struck with amazement that every woman in the Foreign Doctor's hospital could read, from that most Exalted One herself down to the youngest serving maid. Indeed, the two Bible women, who day after day sat in the outer room where patients waited, and there read to them out of the Holy Classic, were no more adept at leafing its sacred pages than were the nurses, and even the older children.

For the three days of the journey back to the village in the top of the highest mountain did very much conversation take place upon all these points. And when invariably at intervals there was raised the inquiry as to the reason for all these things so much to be desired by any woman, always the explanation mutually agreed upon was the same. It

was that those other women, like themselves, and yet so very unlike, were Persons of the Doctrine—Christians.

The men of their houses offered no objection when, as is the custom in China, their dutiful wives first craved their permission to discard the worship of the household gods, and of those other hideous ones down in the temple, and become followers of that Jesus Christ of whom so lately they had learned. The men had very properly inquired what "being a Christian" included, and very simply the two women told them that which in ten days they had absorbed of the new Doctrine. The gist of their information to the men was that the content of the Doctrine was like to express itself in quiet voices speaking gentle words, and in hands which delighted in tender ministrations. This they told them.

Also they begged permission to go one day in the week a day's journey down the other side of their own mountain where, according to the word of the Foreign Doctor, a Person of the Way would speak words concerning

the Doctrine. This day, which was regularly set apart by Christians for worship and which was called the Sabbath, would fall upon the third day after their return from the Hospital, for very carefully had they kept this fact in their minds. Upon their solemn word that not one small item of their housekeeping responsibilities should be omitted on that day—very certainly also that ample provision should be made in the way of supplies of toothsome food of the variety which lies close to men's ribs—the heads of those two houses gave their consent for the church-going venture of their wives.

Even before the sun had risen high enough to scatter its showers of gold over the bamboo fronds or kiss the dew from the sleepy eyelids of the flowers which starred the mountainside, Bo-ai and Chieng-ging were upon their way. This was to be a day to them of spiritual outreach and their eager faces and their shining eyes proclaimed to every passing wayfarer on the mountain paths that they were bound upon some happy and wholly unusual errand.

Very great satisfaction and very sweet content glowed upon the faces of the two friends when, for all their long faring, with not the tiniest fleck of dust visible upon their blue coats and wearing against the glossy blackness of their hair a few waxen petals of the plum blossom, they reached at last their objective, a tiny church in the valley.

They entered with timid, noiseless steps, uncertain of what might be expected of women like themselves, as yet not at all sure of the ways of Persons of the Doctrine in such a case.

In far away little churches like this one, hidden in some valley of southern China, there is announced properly enough an hour at which worship begins. The blue coated congregation, however, made up of folks who, like Bo-ai and Chieng-ging, must come from long distances, and upon their own feet at that, do not always arrive upon the tick of the clock, though in China even the clock does not seem to hurry. Because of these things, then, there is nothing arbitrary about the hour of beginning the worship. That be-

gins when the congregation gathers, and upon this day its assembling was unusually delayed.

The service ended at last, and the two new seekers after truth had again taken the trail toward the heights where their village perched. It was hard going, the journey back, for always the path wound upward. The shadows too slanted long across the valley, and the wind, now that the sun's fires had dwindled, blew chill across their faces.

In spite of the fact that black night would envelop them long before they could reach their own doors, and that at the very thought of the certain anger of their men their knees, wearied to pain with the climbing, trembled under them, they clasped hands in the darkness and agreed that the day had been worth all it would cost. They had learned more fully of the Doctrine, and the sinews of their spirits were strengthened, as after days were to prove.

It was over after a little, the cruel fury of their men because of their late home-coming. Even the marks which this fury had laid

across their backs eventually faded. But the words concerning the Doctrine which they had heard that Sabbath day in the valley church—they did not fade.

If men could decree that women could not be Christians when being such involved going to church one day in seven, then women could decide that as for them they would be Christians without going to church.

Also after much thinking, and between them talking it all over, and withal with the full knowledge of how little fitted they were to undertake so great a project, the two new followers of the Doctrine concluded that they themselves must establish a church.

So sometimes does the Spirit of all truth lead trusting and sincere souls into the way of a great adventure for God.

V

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

BO-AI and Chieng-ging never forgot for one small moment that their sole theological and religious background consisted of what they had learned in a stay of ten days in a Christian Hospital for Women, and one service in a little church in the valley. Also they knew that the portion of the Doctrine which had trickled through their ignorance and permanently remained in their memories must perforce furnish forth all the spiritual pabulum with which such new followers as might join them could be provided. Neither of the women could read and there was no base of supplies, spiritual or intellectual, upon which, when their very limited store of knowledge was exhausted, they might draw for fresh material.

In fact, the whole course in Christian

homiletics offered, when in due time this branch of the one universal Church of God became operative in a far off mountain in China, consisted of exactly three things. These were: the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and that Star-Spangled Banner of Missions, "Jesus loves me, this I know." But the greatest asset of all in the planting of the new enterprise was that down in the Hospital, Bo-ai and Chieng-ging had themselves learned to pray. Truly this was greatest of all.

Now, you must not be forgetting that the training of the two women in the useful art of establishing churches had covered just ten days. Also you must have imagined that the hindrances standing ready to block the new project were many and serious. One was disposed of when a neighbor woman, though inspired with nothing more than sheerest curiosity, offered a room in her more ample house for the meeting place of the expected congregation.

The question as to the size of the congregation was settled when at the initial service,

called with much trepidation, the upper room was quite filled to capacity with women and children.

Possibly, however, of all the problems to be solved that of thinking through some plan by which with unquestionable accuracy the Sabbath day might be marked was most stubbornly difficult. That this must be set apart as holy unto the Lord for reverent meditation and attendance at worship if one's men didn't mind—all this the founders of the new church were sure. But how to tell just which out of all the long procession of dull, monotonous days which dawned upon their village and dragged through it and died, was to be halted and appropriated as the Sabbath—this they did not know. The moons they numbered, but unless it was marked down in the book of their history or tradition no day was noted. Certainly the foreign custom of observing one day in seven for ceasing work and "doing" the Doctrine was most difficult to follow when there was no way of knowing which particular day it should be.

I know in China a certain devout old person of the Doctrine who, being too far upon life's way to permit his memory to keep up with him, never can think to close his shop until he sees the missionary go past his door on her way to Sabbath school. Then always he hobbles forth and puts up his shutters and hangs upon a nail driven into one of them a sign in Chinese that would be in the American equivalent of "Closed because this is the Lord's Day." So does this old person of the Doctrine announce his Christian standing.

But through the mountain village where lived Bo-ai and Chieng-ging no missionary had ever treked on her way, thereby indicating to two anxious women that the divinely appointed day for worship had come. But think out the trying puzzle they must—and they did.

At first it was suggested by Bo-ai that there be adopted a system of straight marks, drawn carefully with the writing brush upon the wall of the upper room, the place of worship—one for each common day, the seventh

for the Sabbath. Later this plan was sadly rejected. All straight marks look much the same, and in such a maze of marks as were like to be drawn accuracy as to the day to be especially set apart would not be possible. Women, too, are so stupid—so slow of memory!

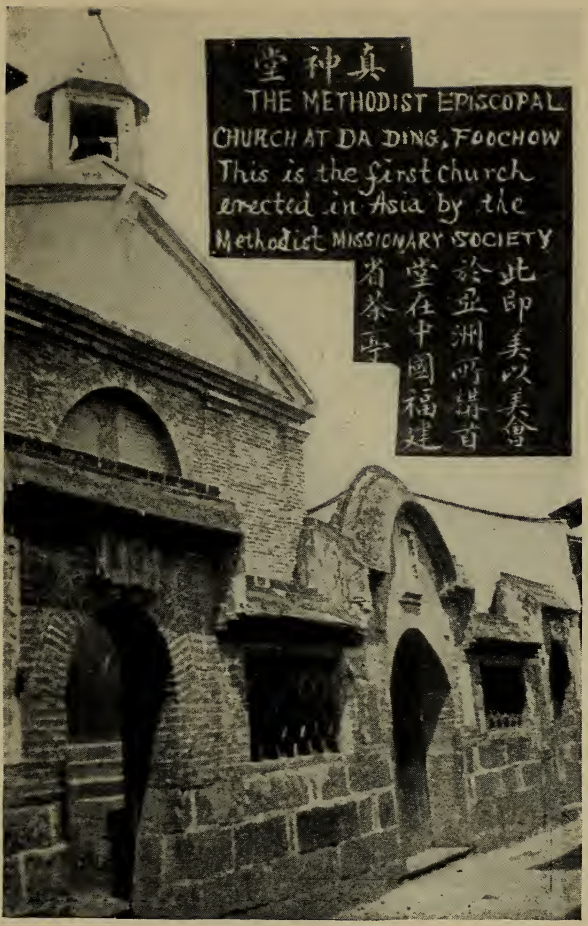
Most tangles, give them time enough, will eventually untangle of themselves. Chiengging it was to whom was vouchsafed the inspiration. It was she who remembered with fresh vividness what she had learned from the Foreign Doctor of that holy Jesus God, who being himself sinless had most unjustly been stretched upon a cross for the sins of others, her own included. So it was she who suggested—timidly, because she was not sure that it was reverent—that his day be marked with the symbol of his suffering, the cross.

Eventually it fell out that in the ecclesiastical fresco which was begun upon the wall of the upper room on that day when this embryo church first functioned the basic motif was a cross.

Just how long afterward I do not know,

but of a certainty it was several years, that a Chinese pastor shepherding a flock of Christians well established in the Way in a city far across a distant valley, felt within his heart a strange yearning toward "those other sheep" wandering in spiritual darkness in the purple mountains whose shadowy outlines were becoming to him a daily challenge. Eventually he became unable to resist the call of those helpless human things, intruding as it did upon his sensibilities like the bleating of lost lambs. Ultimately the Chinese pastor took his way to the mountains far away across his own valley, consumed with his determined intent to lead those "other sheep" into the safe fold of Divine Love.

The journey was a matter of several days, but every step of the way his heart beat with a great exultation because of the glory of his mission. If he was footsore when at last he had scaled the heights and at the end of the last long day had rested in a mountain inn, so also was he glad, for now his real shepherding might begin.



THE OLDEST METHODIST CHURCH IN ASIA, AT FOOCHOW

But though the raucous noises of the village streets had given way to the muffled murmur of family noises behind shuttered little shops or brown mud walls, still always at the Chinese mountain inn will be gathered the curious crowd of men, whose very isolation urges them toward that center of possible outside communication. It was to such a group respectfully, though eagerly, gathered around the pastor from the distant valley, and in the dingy half dark of the inn, that he spoke of the mission which had drawn him to those heights.

Very intently, very politely did the mountain men hear him through. If occasionally in the lantern's dim glare a significant look passed from eye to eye about the circle, no one spoke. Not until the guest had fully spoken many words concerning the Doctrine and his hot-hearted hope that soon there might be Christians among them, was the silence broken.

It was after the pastor had altogether ceased that at last out of that deep silence which lay upon them there spoke a voice.

It was an old voice, coming from one man in the gathered group to whom the years clung heavily. His were quiet words, but clear and compelling, and what he said was:

"There are Christians in these mountains. The place of their dwelling is the next village."

My pen does not know how to write down for you here the measure of the great amazement of the guest from the plain. Naturally, having long known of the purple mountains, unoccupied by evangelist, unvisited by missionary, it was with great difficulty that he was convinced that the sole purpose of his visit had already mysteriously become an achievement. Even when, at the conclusion of the brief sentence voiced by the old man, a murmur of assent ran through the group, the shepherd of the flock in the valley found believing it a difficult business. Could it be possible that preceding his own coming, inspired by such a lofty ambition as was his, had come another whose mission had been identical with his own?

One need not remain in doubt when indis-

putable proof is said to be near at hand. Although all the mountain was enwrapped in the soft blackness of a southern night, and few in China then venture out over the narrow paths set with sharp-edged stones, which rim sheer and frightful precipices, there presently emerged from the inn a blue-coated procession of men led by one very old, whose unsteady hand held a lantern. It was a distance through the dark to the next village a full six li, but the spirit of the visitor to whom had just been given such astounding information could brook no delay, which if he wait until morning, must span the remainder of the night.

Because then of the urgency of the guest and also because of their own certainty, the mountain men trod the path through the dark, to find themselves after a while slipping noiselessly through the one street of the village of their quest. Before a house a bit ampler and somewhat better than the others which faced the street, huddling together in close friendliness, the old man with the lantern came to a halt.

There was a sharp rap at the outer door—a few words of greeting in the darkness. Then the silent little procession passed within, and moved slowly up the stairs. A door swung into a block of open space, carved out by the lantern's glare into the proportions of a room.

If anywhere in all the world one special yet perfectly ordinary spot can be transformed into a spiritual "upper room" because to that sanctum once in seven days there comes Jesus Christ to commune with his friends, then this room, revealed by the lantern glow in all its pitiful bareness, was surely such an one.

Eagerly, almost violently, did the pastor from the valley, standing there within the shimmering aura of the dim light, grasp the lantern from the hand of the old man who carried it. He held it high above his head as, peering sharply through the half light, he passed quickly around the four walls of the room. Upon these four walls he beheld an ecclesiastical fresco which, a matter of years before, was begun by two humble women—

disciples, however, of our Lord, whom they had met to their soul's satisfaction during a stay of ten days in a Christian Hospital for Chinese Women.

What the pastor from the plain below saw was a row of marks three deep, etched crudely out upon the four walls of that "upper room"—and every seventh mark was a *cross*.

And there *were* Christians in those mountains.

VI

THE LOOSENED GRIP

"BUT," I began, "you simply must tell me another devil story—one with a different sort of ending, you know."

It was in the sun parlor at the Theological Professor's house again, and I was lazying in the steamer chair.

"I simply can't write that story down, Lady Dear, and leave the folks who read it with such a taste, so to speak, in their mental mouths. I mean, isn't there another story where we—that is, the woman, instead of the devil—wins out? I'm sure there is one!"

And so she told me—though really it was her little Bible Woman's adventure, and it happened just as I shall be writing it down for you.

Siok-leng—which being interpreted means

"Pure White Lily"—was the name of the Bible Woman. Indeed she seemed quite the embodiment of her name too, as she moved about through the filthy mazes of the river villages. Like a lily of spotless whiteness she seemed among the other women, in these places of odor and squalor and unsightly, hidden things her very spiritual reach lifting her out and beyond them. In a vague, wondering way the village women knew this—though had you asked them the why of their almost subconscious perception about Siok-leng's superiority, they could not have told you.

A little way into this world of better things she had inducted some of them when once or twice a year she sampanned down the river and sojourned for a space within those fetid, crowded, nauseous places. It was while upon such an annual or semiannual errand that there happened the adventure of which I am telling you.

A boy who might have turned fifteen had politely approached Siok-leng as she was replacing her Bible and hymn book in the silk

bag which her own fingers had lovingly embroidered as befitted the reliquary of such holy things. The women to whom just a moment before she had been talking had dispersed like a flock of noisily chattering crows, and the little Bible Woman had fetched a long sigh of relief for very tiredness.

The lad, immaculate in his clean blue gown, his hair sleekily glistening like the polished black wood of his own hills, had most punctiliously made his politeness and gravely inquired if the honorable guest from up the river were, as he had heard reported, a Person of the Jesus Doctrine?

There may be persons so designated in the world who hesitate to boldly make the acknowledgment, but not to this division of the faint-of-heart belonged Siok-leng. It was because of the unhesitating affirmative of her answer that presently she was being jostled through the noisy confusion of the crowds in the streets on her way to visit the sick mother of her blue-coated conductor. The section of the village toward which they went was quieter than the streets with which she

was familiar, and the Bible Woman could not but wonder, toward the end of their going, at house after house in the neighborhood standing silent and deserted. Later on she was to find out the reason for this.

An outer gate was opened presently by the lad, and a moment later Siok-leng stood in the guest room of a Chinese house and was being greeted with gentle graciousness by the fragile-looking little mother of the boy with whom she had come.

The watermelon seeds were passed, and then when the boy had slipped out, and the women were alone, between sips of fragrant jassamine tea from tiny cups, the tragic story of the misfortune which had befallen that household was told.

The fragile little woman, according to her own avowment, was in the controlling grip, dire and complete, of demons. Their first frightful invasion was entirely unannounced, the uncanny horde, led by one whom she called "The Prince of Devils," having swarmed in upon her as she sat alone in her house one awful night twelve years before.

So quiet and sane was the recital of her hostess, so calmly she told of the horrid details of the torturing nocturnal visits, so cold grew the little hand which Siok-leng held in hers, that all her heart went out to the pitiful victim.

The demons had come literally swarming into her house, so she told the Bible Woman —such legions of them that there was not sufficient room in all the house to hold them. Even she told Siok-leng of their hideous bodies, and bulging eyes, and long claws which opened and shut as though eager for prey. Altogether they were unspeakably terrible. And some, she said, were handsome devils—really handsome!

Such an one was he, their "Prince," who snatched her about the waist and hissed into her ear that she must dance with him. At that she tried to shrink even farther away from his hot body, for she was a decent, high-class Chinese woman, and such women do not dance. And then tighter and tighter did he grip her, and wilder and wilder grew the mad whirlings, until, lifting the slight little

body from the floor, her hellish torturer swung her upon her own tea table and commanded her to sing.

"And I sang, and I screamed aloud, like the wild thing they had driven me to be," the weary voice of the narrator went on, "until the neighborhood could hear my ravings and came rushing in, while this whole end of the village was in an uproar. With the coming of the people the hordes of demons fled away with shrieking laughter—only, every night for twelve long years they have returned to torture me—and I am tired—tired."

Gradually the nearby families left the neighborhood, being very much afraid when in the night they could hear those ravings.

The Bible Woman remembered the silent, empty houses past which her guide had led her not one hour since. To her now they spote mutely of the tangible outworking of fear, as a force in the lives of the people of her race.

Very diligently too had the head of the house gone about securing relief for his little lady wife. She was the mother of his son,

and, besides, he loved her. Many an idol shrine had been enriched by his gifts, many a priest made to chuckle over the silver he hid in his sleeve—but all to no end. The ghoulish visitants of the night still defied barred doors, and with great fury they violated that house.

Strange news had lately trickled through to the afflicted family, concerning the woman from down the river who was known as a "Person of the Jesus Doctrine," and who daily taught the women of the village, and even went from house to house telling what the people were calling the "Good News." It was with the fervent hope that this Jesus God, a new deity in that community pantheon, and about whom Siok-leng seemed to know much, might outdo, in a contest of strength, the malevolent disturbers of their peace, that the family had importuned the coming of the Bible Woman.

Very carefully, very prayerfully then, did Siok-leng, sitting there, holding the cold little hand of the woman beside her, tell how that while she herself had no power over the

evil things of the night, he who was her God was stronger than all the strong devils that had poured forth from hell to lash her into frenzy. It was he who could deliver her from their thrall. She spoke very solemnly that word, but also she spoke words concerning the conditions upon which only that God, never heard of by her before, could properly be entreated to come to that house.

Certainly he, the only and all-powerful One, would tolerate the presence there of no other gods! All the idols must be taken down from the shelf. If anywhere in all the house, even in the darkest, most secret corner, there was hidden the smallest, most insignificant god—yes, or even a most precious one—out it must come into the light of day and go to its destruction with all these others which must be burned out there in the courtyard of Heaven's Well with an utter and complete burning. All this did Siok-leng say.

When the woman's eager assent was registered, also that of the father of her son, and of that blue-coated light-of-the-eyes-of-

his-parents himself, then a great smoke of burning idols arose from the courtyard of that dwelling, while the idol shelves in their erstwhile most honorable place yawned empty like a toothless mouth.

The menacing deities having been dispatched into the realm of such departed things upon the smoke of their consuming, then did Siok-leng begin her teachings of very sacred and fundamental, yet withal very simple, things in the genesis of the establishment in that house of faith in the Doctrine.

Also Siok-leng opened to that anxious family the Holy Classic, through which was revealed to them that kindly divine Physician who, when in the long ago he walked the ways of men, out of poor tortured folk like the mother of this house had cast many devils. Because these noisome things knew how futile was their case in combat with his great power they did not even try to answer back. There could be no answer to him, the Bible Woman told them.

Also Siok-leng taught the eager woman, now trembling with a great hopefulness that

her salvation was at hand, a little prayer. Chinese lips were saying it that day, yet it was the same petition which universal humanity through the years and under the stress of its burden has syllabled more often than any other—"Lord, save me." Indeed, it was this simple prayer which, should the demon intruders come that night, was to be upon the lips of their harried victim, a most holy and effectual talisman.

"If they come to-night," Siok-leng carefully admonished the woman, "at the very first sight or sound of them, kneel down quickly upon the floor, lift up your head boldly, and your arms, and cry out this prayer to Jesus Christ, who is more powerful alone than all the devils in hell, and they will leave you. Certainly they will go. Have no fear. In the name of Jesus Christ they *must* go."

So, praying for peace upon that house, the Bible Woman went her way back to her lodging. Only first she assured the family that should they for any reason desire her during the night, her glad feet would bring

her to them. And for long hours through that night Siok-leng prayed. In the behalf of a suffering woman she prayed that effectual prayer which "changes things."

The azalea flowers—that "all-over-the-mountain-red," which splashes with gorgeous color the hills of southern China—were shaking the dews of the night from their flaunting pennants—and the young spring was laughing out loud in the golden sunshine when, very early in the morning, Siok-leng sped out to that erstwhile house of sorrow upon the fringes of the little village.

The outside gate stood ajar as though in wide-hearted welcome, and an instant later she stood inside the guest room, where only a few hours ago she had held the cold little hands of a soul-weary woman. She noted that the empty idol shelves had been heaped with glowing red azaleas—and she wondered.

She wondered no longer when into the guest room came unfalteringly, even though there lingered a degree of languor in her

movement, that woman who for twelve long years had been veritably a woman of great sorrows. Very gently she came toward her guest, her face raised and shining as with a radiance not earthly, and withal overspread with a great peace.

"Yes, they came," she answered the eager interrogation of the Bible Woman. "Oh, yes, they came!" And there were more than had ever before swarmed through her doorway, and they jeered and mocked and laughed as though to terrorize her, and conquer her by their very onslaught of hideous noise!

But something, so she said, had blocked them, where their fiery breath was almost close enough to scorch and wither her. She had slid from her chair to her knees there upon the floor, as Siok-leng had expressly instructed her, but now as the hateful horde advanced, and in her soul she knew that the ultimate crisis was at hand, almost her leaden arms refused to be lifted up—almost some awful magnetism from below chained her suffering face to the earth—almost her voice as she essayed to pray, that prayer,

"Lord, save me," seemed drowned by the sound of her own pounding heart as well as by demon shriekings.

In that final moment though, it was Siokleng's pure strong face which visualized itself for a moment before her frenzied vision. Very clearly in her awful extremity, so she afterward said, it was the sound of Siokleng's calm, convincing voice saying, even as she herself had heard her say that very day: "Certainly they will go! Have no fear. In the name of Jesus Christ, they *must* go!" And as her own voice confidently arose above the demon din, even before the little prayer was finished, they did go!

And there was great peace upon that dwelling, which was never again in all the years that followed a House of Sorrow, but a House of Joy.

VII

THE BANDIT TRAIL

WHEN we left home our program did not include a jaunt through the bandit country. But, thanks to favoring circumstances when we reached the Middle Kingdom, neither did it preclude such a feature.

O, it's great to go a-jaunting,
Where a program doesn't bind you,
And if adventure you're a-wanting,
Cast your bait and one will find you.

Not that we absolutely courted adventure, of course, but when it came our way at the beck of a willing mind, we did not sidestep it. Certainly we didn't! This particular unusual happening came about through a visit to us while we lingered in the Happy Valley of two missionary folk from up river. They certainly had what Friend Chesterton would designate "personality," those two! At

least that is how I account for our ready promise to them of a return visit back where they told us they lived—"Back in the mountains in the bandit country, where you can't go any farther."

Now, the jumping-off place had always had an enticing sound to my adventurous soul, and "where you can't go any farther" was its equivalent. But "bandits"! That "sold" the proposition to me and—well, we went. The journey took us again far up the stately old Ming, in the same old houseboat poled by the same old crew. The whole distance covered was only a matter of a hundred miles each way. But when, including a stay of a couple of days at your destination, the going takes you ten days, and means houseboat and sampan, mountain chairs, and much of the time your own good feet—because there isn't a mile of railroad in the province—one feels quite traveled when once more he is back in the Happy Valley.

The voyage started auspiciously, and all went well for a few hours. Then the skipper balked. He ran the houseboat over shore-

ward upon the very edge of a sand bar and absolutely refused to make the craft "walk" a pole's length farther. The little lady who runs a big industrial work for friendless Chinese widows down the river, was our beloved personal conductor along this bandit trail, and although most politely she urged the dower-faced captain to resume the channel immediately, she was politely, but I thought a bit scornfully, refused. Then the Personal Conductor scolded in her best and most forceful Chinese, only to be as emphatically, even noisily, informed that the boat would not "walk."

The reason? Perfectly simple. Had not the skipper told Cing-Soi, the foreign woman's houseman, when he bargained for the boat, that in the contract there must be the furnishing of one indispensable item by the foreigners themselves?

Now the bargain as made was that our party of five was to pay an aggregate amount of three dollars per day which covered the entire expense for all of us, save that for food and bedding. The latter we must pro-

vide. But the indispensable "something" without which the skipper would not allow his craft to be poled another stroke—"What was it?" urged the missionary.

Then it came out, the statement of this astounding omission of us most negligent foreigners, which proved to be—the American flag—nothing less. Shades of Betsy Ross—and this was China! Our skipper proceeded to elaborate his point. Did not the honorable but careless foreign guests know that they were embarked upon a somewhat questionable voyage which would carry them through the very heart of the bandit country? Also were they not aware that the Chinese flag (when this protection was mildly suggested by one of us imbecile foreigners) would but invite the confiscation of the houseboat, should the bandits in their maraudings around spy us from the shore? Absolutely, the Flowery Flag would be but as a painted rag in the eyes of the buccaneers. In fact, what the skipper said, all of which is too voluminous to record, was that were we to persist against his advice, we might as

well order our coffins—or, as far as he was concerned, its American equivalent, "Nothing doing," and he meant it too.

Then, as often happens, in the very moment of despair came inspiration. Came the vision of a church in Boston, back home—a million miles away it seemed that morning—a church crowded to the doors with missionary pilgrims. Came also the memory of one face in the throng—of a silken flag sent forward with the loving urge that it be the talisman upon the long trail which one in that Sabbath day multitude was about to begin.

It was this flag, then, which, sewed by eager fingers to a stair rod, one of the three holding down a bit of matting on the diminutive stairs leading from cabin to deck, was in a real American jiffy flying bravely from the stern of our craft. Most devoutly did we thank Heaven as well as the generous heart of the donor of that blessed bit of silk that its proportions were sufficiently ample to splash the sunshine with color enough to be seen from the shore.

The effect of this improvised flag raising was instantaneous. The skipper emerged from surliness to serenity, from scowls to smiles. The coolies stripped off their patched jackets and reached for their poles. The very eyes of our boat bulged with benignity as, to the weird crooning of our boatmen's song, we once more cut the upstream current.

That was one unique cruise, let me tell you! There was a world of folk upon the river. The women of the sampans, their floating domiciles drawn for purposes of house-cleaning upon occasional stretches of sandy beach, were conducting vigorous campaigns of scrubbing. Cunning pig-tailed kiddies frolicked on the sands, while fat little babies, securely anchored to the boats by ropes tied about their middles, made frantic efforts to fall off and get drowned. Every sort of weird-looking craft which could be conjured by one's imagination, or dreamed of by a poet, or sung about by a singer, floated past us on its way to the sea. There were great brown sails, like the outspread wings

of some huge, impossible bird. There were tattered, ragged ones and others, white once, now gray, splotched with blue patches—the color in which all China clothes itself. There were silent, mysterious craft which passed us, and others from which peered out curious but kindly faces. The family wash, consisting inevitably and unvaryingly of blue coats and trousers, flew with animation from the bamboo poles, upon which, across some quarter of many boats it was hung, or, rather, impaled, since clothespins were minus.

It was a journey which took us through the tumultuous upper reaches of the Ming, one to prove the mettle of our boatmen and the poise of our own nerves. Gigantic rocks and bowlders, as well as hidden and dangerous reefs, here strew the river bed, while the rushing waters, maddened at the obstructions in their seaward course, plunge frantically at the houseboat as though to tear it to atoms. No crew could pole against such frenzied force, and alone steer our craft around the jagged horn of a rock of immense

bulk which thrust itself outward as though to gore our prow.

Time and time again they attempted it, to fail as often, every new venture sending our poor little boat back again downstream far beyond the point where the last fresh start was made. The whole effort finally ended with half our crew, harnessed with ropes which were firmly fastened to the boat, crawling across the rocks to the shore. Once there, bent, like beasts, upon all fours, they crept along the mountainside, and with the terrific poling of the straining, sweating, yelling coolies on the houseboat we finally rounded the point and glided peacefully into the placid waters of the channel.

While all these noisy nautical maneuvers were in process I saw creeping along the precipitous sides of the mountainous shore, fairly in the wake of our straining crew, a little blue-coated, blue-trousered woman. The memory of her will always prick at my heart. She too was creeping upon hands and feet, and harnessed about her shoulders was the cable pulled taut from its fastening

Photographed by the author

THE STRUGGLING BIT OF FEMININITY ON THE SHORE

to the big lumber sampan, which behind us had all day been making its slow course upstream.

To some mother's heart back in baby days she might have been "Fragrant Flower" or "Thousand Gold"—I do not know. Probably to the very boat she was pulling, as in some sheltered harbor it lay near the great city below, she was carried one day a bride in her red chair. Perhaps from under its bamboo cover in the dark of some night had trembled the feeble wail of the first baby she had cuddled next to her heart. Others had come afterward; we could see several sturdy youngsters playing upon the diminutive rear deck while an implacable-looking old mother-in-law squatted in solid comfort, with her tobacco pipe in her hands.

Forward on the boat, owner and overlord of all he surveyed, stood the head of this floating residence, a stalwart Chinese man. With raucous voice and angry gesticulation he was shouting directions to that little, despised, creeping thing upon the shore, his wife, whose little brown shoulders were raw

under the chafing of the rope, as upon all fours she strained to the killing point, as she tugged the sampan through that frantic current.

My soul turned sick within me as, fascinated with the very tragedy of it all, I stared wide-eyed at the struggling bit of femininity on the shore, until, our own boat rounding a turn in the river, it was lost to my vision. But to me for always that Daughter of Cathay, bearing not only her rightful burden of wifehood and motherhood, but the back-breaking load of an all but impossible manual task, must symbolize the womanhood of the world where Christ is not. In the name of the Eternal Equities can it be possible that the women of America shall always have so much, and those of the Orient so little of that which makes life radiant?

But it is near the end of our second day out and the sun declines. With the last of its gold it sets a crown upon the mountaintops, and fuses into gorgeous carmine the azaleas which splash their slopes. For it is azalea time in China, and one entirely ceases to

wonder why the character which designates the brilliant blossom translated literally "All-over-the-mountain-red."

If there be a question in your mind as to China's claim to being the "Flowery Kingdom" just take the Bandit Trail in May through the mountains to Kucheng. Young spring had tripped that way a day or two before us, and she had spilled her flower basket. There were long, white sprays of bridal wreath, and a fragrant network of wild honeysuckle, clambering over the green undergrowth.

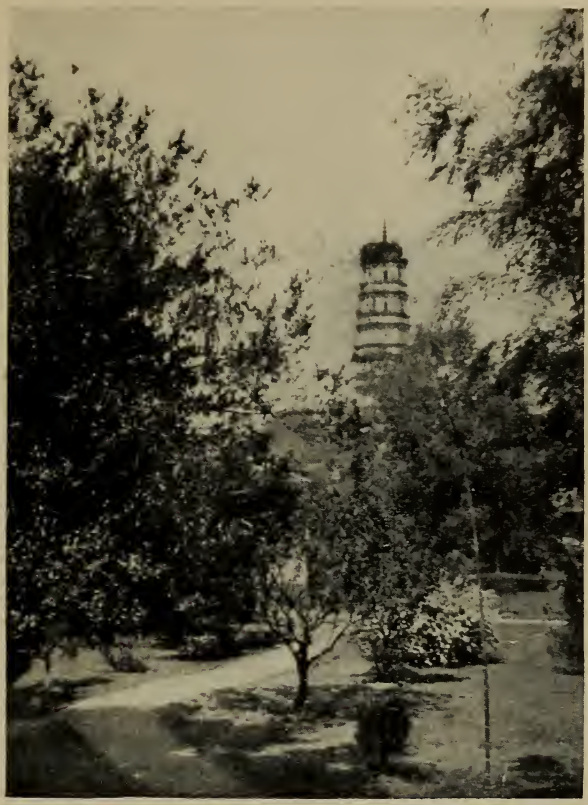
A single bloom of that shower of briar roses could not have been covered by one of your grandmother's flaring teacups—which you will term exaggeration, but which, upon my word, is not. The pear flowers scattered their petals like snowflakes upon our heads, and wide-eyed blue violets looked out from the green lacery of ferns. Wild strawberries promised a luscious find to some subsequent wayfarer, and the pampas-grass whispered gentle secrets into our ears as we passed.

The watery surface of the paddy fields was

beginning to show a sheen of pale jade green, and the feathery fronds of the tall bamboos were joyously bending under the sweet breath of the wind. Somewhere in those mountains through which we trekked that day in our swinging chairs the spring sat enthroned. We walked her path, we almost saw the elusive young thing herself.

But remember this was also the Bandit Trail, and the very stones which paved it had only a few months before run red with blood. Again and again our shouts to each other were stilled, as our caravan filed silently, Indian fashion, through the desolate ruins of once thriving villages. Nothing now remained of them but charred and crumbling walls, over which even in so brief a time and, as if to cover their wounds, kindly Mother Nature was throwing a garment of softest green.

The uprising of the bandits, whose personnel included ex-soldiers, and even men who were themselves mountain men, had been widespread and violent. Masquerading under the patriotic cloak of "Love of Coun-



Photographed by the author

"THE FEATHERY FRONDS OF THE TALL BAMBOOS"

try," the name by which they designated their order, they mustered their legions by thousands, declared death to all officials and if refused tribute money by the villages, looted, murdered, and burned.

To the big walled city down in the plain during that veritable reign of terror fled thousands of refugees from the sorely disturbed heights round about. It was to this same city, rising like an enchanted island from a sea of green, and etched out of a golden sunset, which gladdened our eyes as our coolies swung down the last descent, and we knew that we beheld the end of the trail. But not half so much did the sight of the city gladden our eyes as did another. Finally down the last mountainside we in our chairs, now grown hard in the long going, wound past a living streamer of blue—a human streamer—made up of hundreds of schoolboys, immaculate in their clean blue cotton gowns, who with their professors, dignified beyond expression and quite as kindly, had gathered there to give us welcome. Outside the city gate were assembled the girls in quite

as imposing a line of their own, while behind them grouped the older women from the Bible Training School. It was the girls too, I love to remember, who gave us that thrilling firecracker salute! Firecrackers! After China no worldly welcome for me, I fear, can ever be quite complete without their noisy heartsomeness.

The Doctor, however, in the Mission House on the hill was the spellbinder, who away into the wee hours held us enthralled with stories of the bandits. For let me tell you this Doctor—and his was a double title, by the way, attained by the medical as well as the theological route—had had more than one "close-up" with these Gentlemen of the Greenwood. As a skillful surgeon and physician in his own hospital as also among the poor in their own wretched dwellings he was known to all who lived in that section of the province.

As shepherd of the flock in the fold of the church with a cross on its spire down in the teeming city, and upon occasions, the itinerating preacher who had found his way into

many of those "other villages," his name was hallowed in a thousand homes. It was this Doctor, then, who in the waning of a wonderful day related to us how upon a certain night not so long before our coming he had been the guest of the bandit chief and his savage crew in a village high up in the mountains and with no man of his own race near.

All through those months of bloody marauding there was one fact which was outstanding in its significance. Though death without mercy was to be the portion of all officials luckless enough to fall into their hands, and a similar fate was to be visited upon the inhabitants of resisting villages, by solemn edict of the bandit chief himself upon neither the person nor the property of Christians were violent hands to be laid. If there were needed convincing proof of the practical power of the Christian faith upon the non-Christian mind, it would seem to be here. But with such protection available for believers it followed logically that just at that particular season the church both within the walled city and in the surrounding villages

was deluged with applications from those who craved entrance. Verily, to save one's life is worth the abandonment of even the family idols!

But there was no "revival" of this sort encouraged by the mission just now. Those recruiting agencies for souls, the churches, except when regular services were held, were absolutely closed. Be assured that those missionaries of ours, the Doctor and all the rest, both to bandit and brothers are likewise Apostles of the Square Deal. For that reason there was displayed upon the breast of every Christian a scrap of yellow, the characters upon which registered his name, his church, and the exact location of the latter. As proof that these were authentic facts there were appended the name of the pastor, the superintendent of the district, and the mission director—the last being the Doctor himself. The name-roll too by which these established ones could be verified, was not one of these nailed to the door of every church?

It was during these anxious days that the

Doctor, urged by some human necessity in a distant mountain village, had taken his way there on foot, accompanied only by one of his students from the mission school. The human necessity dealt with, the Doctor and his aide, having covered some distance upon their homeward way, found themselves with evening upon them still a matter of some sixteen miles from their objective. More, they had thrust upon them by wayfarers upon the mountain path as they neared this particular village the rather disconcerting information that, since it had recently been appropriated by the robber chief and several hundred of his followers, it would be a most desirable locality to avoid.

The Doctor, devoutly wishing that days in this season were longer, and making a hasty but definite decision to speed up and cover the miles between him and home by morning, was entirely unafraid, but decidedly disgusted, to be met at the edge of the town by the bearer of a polite invitation from the big bandit for an interview.

Now, several critical cases in the hospital

and some important parish matters were very much just then the stronger urge in the Doctor's program than such casual matters as visits to bandit chiefs. So with all proper politeness—no one could outdo the medical man there—he instructed the runner to return to headquarters with the message that the most unworthy and insignificant foreign doctor was very much in a hurry, and while it caused him great regret to decline the most honorable Chief's gracious invitation to penetrate into his august seclusion, he must hasten upon his way.

On the two men from the valley sped along the winding trail (for the black night was coming down upon them) only to be overtaken in time by the second runner. He carried a message like unto the first, that the voice of the most exalted foreign Doctor would be esteemed as pleasantest music in the ears of the Chief, who begged that the honorable Doctor would condescend to remain for the night under his own most unworthy, if somewhat temporary, roof.

So back trudged the head of the hospital in

the plain, murmuring under his breath—to pacify his own impatience at such an exhibition of Chinese perseverance—"After all it costs nothing to be polite." I have the Doctor's word that he said nothing more than that!

It was quite the most pretentious house in that village, now deserted by all but the bandit crew, to which the Doctor was conducted. Through the outer gate, across the court of Heaven's Well, and into the guest hall he followed his guide. Then after being much kowtowed to by various bandit dignitaries and the making of much ceremonious politeness upon his own part, into the most august presence of the worst outlaw in south China was ushered the Doctor.

And the outlaw himself? Oh, he was nobody of very terrible personal presence, so the Doctor told me. In fact, he was still in his twenties, and a real boyishness—albeit a somewhat savage boyishness—seemed still to garment his personality. That he had outstanding indications of such qualities as would make for crude and cruel leadership

there was no denying, and inwardly the visitor congratulated himself, as he was conducted to the place of honor at the right of his host as he sat upon the *bed,* that the velvet side of banditry, he had reason to believe, was turned toward him. The inevitable watermelon seeds, the tea and the cakes were immediately forthcoming. You might easily have supposed that company of cutthroats to be perfectly tame and tractable Chinese men as with the Doctor, dangling his legs over the side of the Chinese board bed, they all, there in the lantern glow, ate their cakes and munched their melon seeds in peace and quiet. But no one could blame the guest, if his imagination led him (he knowing them so well) to fancy he saw red blood upon the hands that served him!

It was after all formalities and conventions had been scrupulously observed and his personal staff dismissed by the Chief that there was revealed to the Doctor the real reason for this somewhat forced seance. The bandit stated that for many moons he had had great desire to have words with the man who

was now his guest, but that until this very night he had failed to attain the desire of his heart. It became evident early in the somewhat one-sided conversation which thereafter ensued, that the outlaw was for some reason or other making very decided efforts to meet his guest on a positively fraternal basis! To further promote his obvious purpose in thus entertaining his wholly unwilling guest, he advanced presently the somewhat astounding argument, that, though appearances in proof thereof were usually wanting, his conviction was that the mission of Christians and that of bandits were really identical.

The members of his army, to whom he had applied the opprobrious titles with which the whole countryside was familiar—these were, according to the Chief, honest-to-goodness "Love of Country Men." They were patriots of the highest order, bent solely upon the uplift of their fellow men. As such they were entitled to their living at the hands of the populace, and, failing to receive it, they were certainly acting quite within their

rights to appropriate by force that which their necessities required.

Were not the Christians likewise "uplift" people? Certainly the bandits themselves recognized them as such, and had treated them and should continue to treat them as brethren! Was there not pasted upon the wall of the very room in which they were then conferring the list of rules issued by the Chief himself, governing all bandit procedure? And would the honorable Doctor notice the first of these?

So there in the flare of the primitive lantern which his self-constituted host himself held high, the Doctor read in Chinese characters:

"To any man killing a Christian or burning or injuring a Christian church—death."

All of this, you have surmised, was leading up to something, and the big Chief's particular cat was now out of the bag. The big Chief, that most bloody and terrifying somebody in the whole province, wanted—to build a church! He stated his convictions and made his proposition very clearly and, the

Doctor assured me, almost eagerly. His convictions were that churches were good, and made for the uplift of the community. So were Christians. After the present unrest in the mountains had settled down a bit he himself very much desired a church in his own village. In fact, so earnestly did his heart desire such a consummation that he, being possessed with a fair share of this world's goods—that he himself would contribute the plot of ground upon which the church should be builded. To bring about his heart's desire he would go even further —he would furnish all the necessary funds that the walls might be raised and the building completed. All this time this polite cutthroat had himself conducted the major portion of the conversation. Now he waited for his guest to speak.

You may conjure up the picture to your own satisfaction. The Doctor, high up in a mountain village almost on the edge of the world, the enforced guest of the man at the beck of whose finger villages had gone up in smoke, treasures were looted, and hundreds

of innocent folk come to their deaths! And it was this man of blood, surrounded by three hundred or more of his kind, the most hated, the most feared in a province, who was proposing to a lone missionary in a hovel on a mountaintop at midnight, to build a Christian church!

I think I should have liked to see the Doctor just then. He was a Manxman before ever he had won a degree and his hair had a dash of red in its fiber—and mayhap, also his temper. At any rate he warmed up considerably, albeit his eyes held a twinkle as he outlined the potential proportions of the bandit chief's proposition. To begin with, it was evidently the purpose of this adroit marauder to attempt to stage a comeback into peaceful pursuits of life. It may have been that down in some musty corner of his heart there remained one good impulse which was prompting him to make amends in the sight of the people, and while the time seemed opportune, for his career of murder and crime. A church would furnish tangible evidence of a change of heart. The accom-

plishment of his plan would go a long way toward establishing him in the good graces of the public.

But to the Doctor, sitting there in state on the bed beside the bandit, there was quite a different aspect to this church-building proposition. While it was altogether desirable that the Chief should mend his ways, a church which should stand as a monument to such transformation would be plainly undesirable. Certain it is that to most of the community it would have been substantial evidence that gross sins could be atoned for by very material means. The priests in their temples were telling them the same thing. Then the Doctor didn't particularly care to start the "one-man church" in China. The present proposition would result, if accepted, not solely in a "one-man church," which of a certainty such a one would be, but a bandit-bossed church at that! Many of the villagers whose homes had been desolated and whose fields had been ruined and whose relatives had been killed, at the order of this would-be benefactor, might be a bit

nervous about going to his church. This should not be, for surely the doors of a true church should swing wide upon their hinges, and no fear should hover there!

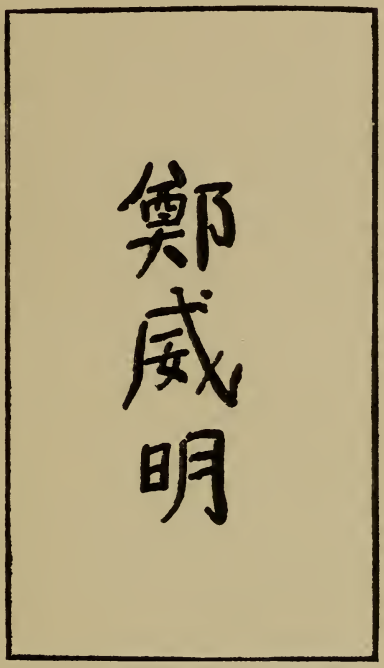
All this the Doctor elucidated honestly and plainly to his host, there in the dim light of the dying lantern flame that night. Also he preached to him that night of One who had said, in the long ago, and was repeating it to-day to guilty souls: "Though your sins be as scarlet, I will make them white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Very early in the morning the Doctor and his student, having bided safely with the bandits for the night, struck the trail down the mountainside for home.

If you are asking if the story ends here, I am telling you that it does not—quite—for I have in my treasure sheaf from China a bit of pasteboard—a calling card it is—on which are three sets of most imposing characters. Upon the reverse side the Doctor himself, who gave me this trophy, has written with his own hand, " 'Mr. Dang,' Ku-

cheng Bandit, now 'Col. Dang,' in Government Service."

The Colonel had been his recent visitor.



THE BANDIT'S CALLING CARD

VIII

THE RIVER DRAGON'S BRIDE

HEN the stage is set for this episode, the telling of an old tale by an old scholar, there must be included a glowing fire upon a hearth, around which down in China's south country there gathers a shivering group of foreigners.

If I must clear myself of inaccuracy as to "shivering" in the south country, I would simply say that down there in the Happy Valley, after the rainy season has thoroughly saturated the landscape for a week or two, folks do shiver over a fire, provided they have one, whether or not they are supposed to.

I myself know of no climate on earth which absolutely trues itself with its hallmark—do you? Climate everywhere has a chronic habit of being "unusual." Once I

actually saw it snow where "Afric's sunny fountains," according to the hymn-book, were supposed perpetually to play.

But to go back to the Happy Valley. There was a crackling fire on the hearth at the Mission House, and the smoke from the aromatic wood that was burning rose, sweet like temple incense, save that unlike that it suggested wholesomeness and purity. What matter that the rain and wind battled about the corners of the house, pursuing each other across the lawn from whence occasionally we could hear the limbs of the old camphor tree crack like artillery play under their combined assault. If the penetrating chill had crept inside and clammily trailed across walls and floor, there was also the cheering circle of warmth from our fire, and we, a group of wayfarers, drawn to this spot from devious distances, comforted ourselves within its cheery glow.

Likewise there was with us the Old Scholar. I am not yet sure when he entered. Certainly, he had not been there while there were being exchanged our experiences

apropos of the junk shop expedition of the afternoon. Oh, those altogether enticing Chinese junk shops—my memory thrills to them yet! Hidden away in queer crannies, around unlooked-for corners, in mysterious alleyways, all of which somewhere intersected the big street, they yielded forth to the eager searcher treasures more or less ancient (the Chinese gauge of value), always fascinating, as also cheap if the persistent searcher can worst the merchant at the diverting little Chinese game of browbeating.

Certainly, the Old Scholar was not present while everybody in the fireside group talked at once. Not even we daring Occidentals would be sufficiently blatant to frivol in the presence of such a perfect product of China's age, dignity, and learning. None of us, had we been interrogated, could have accurately told just when the visitor out of the storm entered the room. Suddenly, quite without announcement or abruptness, he was there, standing well within the door, gravely saluting us, while we, instinctively rising, were apprehensively taking a mental inven-

tory of our probable ability to appear less boorish than we felt.

As we surveyed him there, tall and impressive, his aristocratic line accentuated by a long black coat of silk, and his finely shaped head crowned by a satin cap with a glistening knob of red, it was like being suddenly confronted by some venerable though still forceful king or potentate, without being arrayed in one's festive garments. We foreigners may think ourselves the ultimate in matters of proper conventions, but how at our many blunderings must the Oriental laugh behind his facial mask of benignant imperturbability!

There was a genial gravity, if I may so speak, which clothed our visitor. It was as though the sunshine of his soul smiled serenely above the long years of his human experience with its various vicissitudes.

For thirty years had the Old Scholar inducted, with varying degrees of success, the foreigners of the Concession into the terrifying mazes of the speech of his ancestors. No Oriental with his most exalted reverence

for a teacher could ever surpass the admiration and veneration which was felt for the Old Scholar by every foreigner who had been so favored of the gods as to be his pupil.

For the major part of those thirty years during which there in the Happy Valley he had listened to young missionaries in their frantic attempts to "coo the tones"—which achievement in Chinese seems to underlie all possibility of success—he had stoutly refused to believe the Doctrine. For all those years he had read in his daily lessons with them such teachings out of the Chinese translation of the New Testament as were never uttered by the sages who spoke in his Classics. Obdurately he withstood their unmistakable power, even though with clinched teeth and against his conviction. He was a Chinese of the Chinese. He would admit no Western God to dominate his thought, much less to sit upon the throne of his heart. As were his fathers before him so would he be, and his mental conclusion toward the Doctrine was the Chinese equivalent for "Finis."

Then Kwan-Yin, his wife, a humble but

loving follower of Jesus Christ, had died. Very truly had the Old Scholar loved her, and withal it was the light which had shone in the Vale of the Shadows, as she unafraid passed through, which led him to her God. They tell me that no one who saw the Old Scholar move gravely down the aisle to the altar in church that Sabbath morning, when having made his great and final decision he formally allied himself with the people of the Doctrine, will be likely ever to forget it. When we knew him it was years after that, and when being thoroughly established in the truth, he towered in kingly character above the rank and file of men even as over across the Ming, Kushan, the sacred mountain, looks down at the little hills at her feet.

But it was not of himself that the guest at our fireside spoke that evening while the wind and rain reveled outside and, all politeness having been performed, we once more at our ease sat in a circle about the glowing fire, widened a bit now by his serene presence. It was of things Chinese that he spoke, much that he told us being

first-hand information in regard to quaint and curious customs of Cathay, in response to our eager questionings.

In all my quiver of lore and legend culled from time to time in many climes there is not treasured any more exquisitely lovely than the tale told that wonderful night, by the Old Scholar, of the River Dragon's Bride. As much like he told it to us as it is in me here to repeat it, I am faithfully telling it to you.

For five thousand years the folklore and fairy tales of China have been written down in books. Long before that they lived in the hearts of the people. I gathered from what the narrator said indeed that to-day, as ever, once out of school the Chinese pay no greater attention to their Classics, provided they be not scholars by profession, than do Americans to theirs. Fiction and folklore are loved by old and young among these imaginative and lovable folk, and probably far more than the entire bulk of their Classics do these influence their mind.

When, therefore, little olive-skinned chil-

dren point to a canoe-like craft, long, slender, graceful, carefully protected alike from sun and rain in some conspicuous spot near their community center—had not we ourselves often seen such an one in our faring through the river country?—they will be told that once upon the day of the Dragon Festival this boat was a winner in a furious race with boats of other villages. And the story I am telling you as accounting for the Dragon Boat Races is the same one which for a thousand years Chinese mothers have told their children.

It was very long ago when first these strange events were recorded. It was in that golden age of old Cathay when the justice of Heaven seemed most actively employed with the affairs of men, and all the Flowery Kingdom rejoiced because of abounding prosperity.

But there came one dark day when the beloved Emperor, he who sat in the Purple Palace, ruled in righteousness and dispensed with equity and justice the affairs of state, laid aside his scepter adorned with jade and

virgin gold, and mounted up to become a guest of the Dragon on High.

There then arose in the land an Emperor who was utterly selfish at heart. Misrule and wicked craftiness and great cruelty characterized his reign, and the people, bowed under oppression, mourned because of the evil days which had fallen upon them. The gods themselves turned deaf ears toward them, though they crowded the temples and cast before the altars their most precious possessions. The smoke of costly incense, freighted with the pitiful petitions of the people, rolled upward from every shrine in the land. To crown their sorrows there came down upon the stricken country, already reduced to direst penury by the failure of crops and the levy of heavy taxes, a famine so sore that no record of such an one had ever been written down in all the annals of the Middle Kingdom.

On such a day of human misery and stress certain evil priests, acting willingly under the direction of the unrighteous king, who saw here a fine chance to benefit materially

in purse out of human suffering—ancient ancestor that he was of the modern profiteer —proclaimed an oracle from the gods. It had been divinely revealed, so they blatantly affirmed, that only would prosperity and happiness again descend upon the stricken kingdom were an offering, inconceivably great and precious, made to the terrible Dragon God whose habitation was in the slimy depths of the river. No wonder that the frenzied people, rising from their hunger and disease, clamored loudly that no gift which could lift them out of their distress could be too valuable, no offering too costly.

When later they learned from the lips of the perfidious priests that the only oblation acceptable to the angry Dragon of the River would be the loveliest maid in all the realm, arrayed in bridal grandeur and bedecked with jewels worthy of a king's ransom, they could scarce believe their ears. And when, moreover, they knew that upon a certain day to be proclaimed the luckless lady was to be conveyed in her nuptial chair of red to the water's edge, from thence in

a flower-festooned barge to be rowed by silent oarsmen to her doom in midstream, there was mourning over all the land.

But to the credulous populace all this was believed to be the will of the gods. They had suffered much. Evidently, the wrath of the gods could be appeased only by some such costly sacrifice.

The thing was done, and later upon a lonely beach the body of the ill-fated Bride of Death, stripped of its jewels by agents of the diabolical priests, floated down the river's current to be lost to sight forever in the sea. Strange to relate, the plagues which devastated the land were stayed, and it was small wonder that thereafter for hundreds of years, upon the annual recurrence of that day, to provide against the future fury of the vengeful River Dragon, a similar tragic sacrifice was made.

One day after a long time, there ascended the imperial throne, by the road of the conqueror, a most upright young emperor who was set to exalt all good and put down evil. Immediately discerning the hideous fraud

which for so long had been perpetrated upon the unsuspecting people by the evil descendants of those priests of former days, he resolved for once and all to put an end to it.

For the first time during his reign the day approached, the fifth day of the fifth moon, when once more there was to be chosen the hapless victim who was doomed to be offered to the River Dragon.

The choice, made by a self-appointed commission of two priests and a conscienceless priestess, fell upon the idolized and only daughter of a high official family. Beautiful beyond all words was the chosen maid. All the terms applied by ancient poets to the ravishing beauty of court favorites might have been employed in describing her. Had one inch been added to her height she had been too tall. Her stature diminished by a hair's breadth would have made her too short. One more fleck of powder had rendered her too pale, while another touch of rouge would have ruined her color. Like the plumage of the jewel bird were her adorable eyebrows and her skin was as satin. Her

waist was like a roll of new silk and her teeth like small white shells. Her many suitors, lured from afar by rumors of her loveliness, covered their faces, even when they glimpsed her from a distance, unable to bear the splendor of her charms. It was such an one as this princess over whose luckless head the muddy waters of the river were soon to close, to satisfy, not an angry river deity, but rather the insatiable greed of the evil priests.

The family of the princess was mad with grief. The only son, her brother, clad in coarse sackcloth, visited the temple and upon his knees before the idols vowed to perform the extreme rite of consuming his own cooked flesh; he would renounce his inheritance as the only son of his father, and for the rest of his life beg, a mendicant, from place to place, could only the awful edict which pronounced his adored sister's doom be revoked. The whole city was plunged into mourning but it was all to no avail. The decision of the gods, as revealed to the Commission of Three, must stand.

Preparations for the bridal of death were set in motion. Almost all the city was bidden to the feast, which, according to custom, must be given by the father of the bride before she should start in her marriage chair upon the fateful journey from which she would never return.

Now there was one in the capital city who was not bidden to the feast, and strange to say, this was the young Emperor who had but within recent moons taken his seat upon the Dragon Throne. Whether or not this omission was an oversight, or at the command of the priests, it was not necessary to fathom, since in China, then as now, the sending of a gift to the bride, whether or not a gorgeous scarlet invitation has been received, would insure to the donor thereof a warm welcome to the wedding.

Therefore on the day appointed for the strange bridal, there emerged from the Purple Palace a train of servants bearing upon salvers of finest lacquer a gift of such sumptuousness as none but royalty could devise, and whose glistening grandeur was unbe-

lievable. There were gorgeous flowers whose petals were of coral and jade, every one of which trembled like those of a real blossom. There were butterflies of greenest jade and bracelets frosted with pearls. There were garlands of plum blossoms wrought of milk-white pearls, and chains of gold, and rolls of rarest silk, and embroidered garments. All of these gifts were sent by the Emperor to the house of the bride's father, and shortly after their arrival came the monarch himself. The multitude of guests already gathered made way for him as straight and strong and regal, yet kindly of face and benignant of mien, he strode to the seat of honor which had hastily been prepared for him. He looked every whit what his ancient title designated him—the Son of Heaven.

The wretched little bride, all clad in her bridal finery heavy with jewels, and trembling with the great fear which was upon her, was presently led from her own apartment, in which during the feast she had sat aside weeping. She was about to be placed

in the red chair, when her attendants were halted by the voice of the Emperor.

"I do not yet see the bridegroom," he said, speaking clearly amidst the great silence which now covered the throng of wedding guests. "Surely," he went on, "the bride will not leave her father's roof until her happy husband comes to claim her. Has he not yet come?"

A great hope began to stir in the hearts of the people as the words of their young Emperor fell upon their ears, while the bride's family, prostrated in sorrow, scarce dared believe they heard aright.

"Has the bridegroom not yet come?" again asked the royal questioner.

And all the people murmured, "No one has come."

"Then," resumed he, "we must know why he tarries so late. I will send at once to his palace which you say is at the bottom of the river, a messenger who will announce to him that his lovely bride awaits him here."

The head priest of the evil trio, who were now on the swift road to their complete un-

doing, was the first runner to be dispatched. Willing hands provided him prompt conduct to the barge, which, gay with its flowers, lay waiting at the water's edge for the poor little bride. Without a further word, the priest upon whom grim retribution had so suddenly fallen was rowed to midstream, there to take the path to the palace of the River Dragon which he himself had designed for the lily feet of a lovely maid.

At the house of the bride's father the wedding guests lingered, the bride herself sitting once more apart, but with the birds singing in the topmost branches of her heart. Listening through her silken curtains she again heard that now beloved voice once more addressing the guests:

"Has the bridegroom sent back my messenger to say when he will come, or the reason for his strange delay? The hour grows late. This is a most dishonorable doing, that so beautiful a bride should be thus deserted at her wedding chair. Has my messenger returned?"

And all the people, upon whose cloud of

THE BRIDAL CHAIR

sorrow a great light was bursting, now shouted back to him, "No one has returned!"

Then the second priest was named as messenger to the delinquent bridegroom, and upon his failure to return the wicked old priestess was sent the way of her confederates in crime.

Just as the red ball of the sun dropped down behind the mountains, and while the happy guests could scarce repress their joy until their splendid young ruler should finally speak, he slowly rose in his place and said, "The sun has set and though we have waited for him many hours, the much feared River Dragon, who for ten thousand moons has afflicted the homes and hearts of my people, has not come to take his fair young bride. I have given him ample time to make good his ancient claim and he has failed. This winsome bride is not for him, and nevermore shall he curse my people or my country."

And all the people shouted with a great and joyous shout, "Death to the River Dragon! Long live our king!"

And he *did* live long, and with him, the

sole Queen of his heart and kingdom, reigned the lovely Princess who would, but for him, have become the River Dragon's Bride.

In memory of that great deliverance, to this very time, upon the fifth day of the fifth moon there are rowed upon the rivers of China the Dragon-Boat races, in all the brilliance of their decoration, and whose sole guerdon for victory is a garland of flowers.

O China! Are you yourself the Pretty Princess whom to-day your enemies, after stripping you of your jewels, both national and material, would consign to your doom beneath the murky waters of the River of Oblivion?

Hold fast to your courage, Pretty Princess. Your own dauntless Deliverer shall yet come, and you too shall live happily ever after.